A

Syſtem of Divinity,

in

A COURSE of SERMONS,

on the

FIRST INSTITUTIONS of RELIGION;

On the BEING and ATTRIBUTES of GOD;

on ſome of the moſt important

ARTICLES of the CHRISTIAN-RELIGION,

in Connection;

And

On the ſeveral Virtues and Vices of Mankind:

with Occaſional Diſcourſes.

Being a Compilation from the beſt Sentiments of the polite Writers, and eminent, ſound Divines, both ancient and modern, on the ſame ſubjects, properly connected, with Improvements, particularly adapted for the Uſe of chief FAMILIES and STUDENTS in DIVINITY; and for CHURCHES, for the Benefit of Mankind in general.

Volume XVIII.

By the Rev'd Wm. DAVY. A. B.

LUSTLEIGH, DEVON.

Printed by Himſelf. —— Fourteen Copies only.

MDCCCIII.

A

System of Divinity

in

A COURSE of SERMONS,

on the

FIRST INSTITUTIONS of RELIGION,

On the Being and Attributes of GOD;

on some of the most important

Articles of the Christian-Religion,

in Connection;

And

On the several Virtues and Duties of Mankind:

with Occasional Dissertations.

Printed for Thomas Longman, at the Ship in Paternoster-Row.

Volume XVIII.

By the Revd W. Dodd, A.B.

Lustration, Devon.

Printed by Hamlet ——— for Lucian Copies only.

MDCCLIII.

SERMONS

on

the ſeveral Virtues

and

Vices of Mankind.

"Cry aloud; ſpare not, lift up thy Voice "like a Trumpet, and ſhew my People their "Tranſgreſſions, and the Houſe of Jacob "their Sins." *Iſaiah.*

"Ceaſe to do Evil: — Learn to do well." *Iſaiah.*

"Abhor that which is Evil: — Cleave to "that which is Good." *Paul.*

"Add to your Faith Virtue." *Peter.*

SERMONS

on

the Several Duties

and

Vices of Mankind.

CONTENTS

of the

EIGHTEENTH Volume.

SERMON CCCXXXVI.

Secret Sins,—Nature of them defined, with the juſt Grounds of Repentance for them.

Pſal. xix. 12. "Who can underſtand his Errors? Cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults." — Page 1

SERMON CCCXXXVII.

Sins of Infirmity,

Nature and Kinds of them.

Matt. xxvi. 41. "The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Fleſh is weak." —— —— 18

SERMON CCCXXXVIII.

On preſumptuous Sins.

Nature and Heinouſneſs of them.

Pſal. xix. 13. "Keep thy Servant alſo from preſumptuous Sins; leſt they get the Dominion over me: ſo ſhall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great Offence." —— —— 41

SERMON

CONTENTS.

SERMON CCCXXXIX.

Sin not chargeable upon God:
with the Nature of Temptations, conſidered.

James i. 13, 14. "Let no Man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man. But every Man is then tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed." ——— Page 60

SERMON CCCXL.

On enticing others to Sin.

2 Tim. iii. 13. "Evil Men and Seducers ſhall wax worſe and worſe, deceiving, and being deceived." 76

SERMON CCCXLI.

The Folly and Danger of complying with
the Enticements of Sinners.

Prov. i. 10. "My Son, If Sinners entice thee, conſent thou not." ——— ——— 94

SERMON CCCXLII, CCCXLIII.

On fraternal Reproof: — in Oppoſition to
complying the Enticement of Sinners.

Heb. iii. 13. "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; leſt any of you be hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin." ——— ——— 113, 138

SERMON

CONTENTS

SERMON CCCXLIV.

The Wisdom of regarding Counsel, and the Folly of rejecting it.

Prov. xii. 15. "The Way of a Fool is right in his own Eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto Counsel is wise." ——— Page 159

SERMON CCCXLV, CCCXLVI.

Bad Company, ———

evil Tendency of it, with Means to prevent it.

1 Cor. xv. 33. "Be not deceived; evil Communications corrupt good Manners." ——— 177, 189

SERMON CCCXLVII.

Good Company: great Importance of it.

Prov. xiii. 20. "He that walketh with wise Men, shall be wise: but a Companion of Fools shall be destroyed." ——— 209

SERMON CCCXLVIII.

The Christian Character,

———with Arguments to support it.

(in Supplement, &c. to good and bad Company.

Ephe. iv. 1. "Walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called." ——— 231

SERMON CCCXLIX, CCCL.

Evil Habits, Sin and Danger of them.

Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Æthiopian change his Skin,

or

or the Leopard his Spots? then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do Evil." —— Page 259, 275

SERMON CCCLI, CCCLII.

Early Education,
the beſt Preſervative from evil Habits.

Prov. xxii. 6. "Train up a Child in the Way he ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." —— —— —— 292, 317

SERMON CCCLIII.

Inconſtancy, &c.

Gen. xlix. 4. "Unſtable as Water, thou ſhalt not excel." —— —— —— 350

SERMON CCCLIV.

Univerſal Obedience,
in Oppoſition to Inconſtancy, &c.

James ii. 10. "Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all." —— 380

SERMON CCCLV.

Inferior Duties,
their great Importance.

Matt. xxiii. 23. "—Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." —— 396

CONTENTS

SERMON CCCLVI, CCCLVII.

On improving Time.

Isaiah lv. 6. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near."

——— Page 414, 440

SERMON CCCLVIII, CCCLIX. CCCLX.

The Danger of Delay, or Death-bed Repentance; an Incentive to Improvement of Time.

Ecc'us xviii. 22. "Defer not till Death to be justified." ——— ——— 461, 485, 499

CONTENTS

SERMON CCCLVI, CCCLVII.

On improving Time.

Isaiah lv. 6. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near."

——— Page 419, 440

SERMON CCCLVIII, CCCLIX.

CCCLX.

The Danger of Delay, or Death-bed Repentance; an Incentive to Improvement of Time.

Eccles. xviii. 22. "Defer not till Death to be justified." ——— ——— ——— 460, 479, 499

SERMON CCCXXXVI.

Secret Sins.
Nature of them defined,
with the juſt Grounds of Repentance for them.

Pſal. xix. 12. "Who can underſtand his Errors?
"Cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults."

The only Method of coming to a diſtinct Knowledge of our Sins, and to a due Senſe of them, (as already obſerved *) is Self-Examination; and therefore it is, that we are ſo frequently exhorted to enter into ourſelves, to converſe with our own Hearts, and to ſearch out the Evil which is in them. But often it happens that this Method, after the ſincereſt and moſt laborious Inquiry, leaves Men under great Diſſatisfaction of Mind, and ſubject to the frequent Returns of Doubts and Miſgivings of Heart; leſt ſomething very bad may have eſcaped their Search, and, for Want of being expiated by Sorrow and Repentance, ſhould remain a Debt upon their Souls at the great Day of Account. As

(*) Vol. xvii. Page 263.

As in temporal Concerns, Men often know, that by a long Courſe of Prodigality, and many expenſive Vanities, they have contracted a great Debt upon their Eſtates, and have brought themſelves to the very Brink of Poverty and Diſtreſs; and yet, when they try to think and conſider of their Condition, find themſelves utterly unable to ſtate their Accounts, or to ſet forth the Particulars of the Debt they labour under; but the more they endeavour to recollect, the more they are convinced that they are mere Strangers at Home, and ignorant of their own Affairs: ſo in ſpiritual Concerns likewiſe, Men who have been long acquainted with Vice, and long Strangers to Thought and Reflection, when they come to be ſenſible of the Danger of their Condition, and to ſet themſelves ſeriouſly to repent, know in general that they have a heavy Weight of Sin and Guilt upon their Souls; but yet, that the Particulars, though many and heinous, which they are able to recollect and charge themſelves with diſtinctly, fall very ſhort of the Senſe they have of their Condition, and do by no Means fill up That which they know to be the Meaſure of their Iniquities. And hence it is, that after the moſt careful Examination of themſelves, and the moſt ſolemn Repentance for all their known Sins, they do not always enjoy that Peace and Tranquility of Soul which they expected, and had promiſ-

ed

ed themſelves, as the bleſſed Fruits of Contrition; but ſuffer extremely under uncertain Hopes and Fears, not being able to ſatisfy themſelves that their Repentance was perfect, which they know was formed upon a Knowledge of their Sins that was very imperfect.

The holy Pſalmiſt had this Senſe of his Condition, and felt how unable he was ſufficiently to acknowledge his own Guilt before God, when he broke-forth into the Complaint with which the Text begins, "Who can underſtand his Errors?" or, (as it runs in the Tranſlation, which is more familiar to us,) "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?"

In this Diſtreſs his only Refuge was to the Mercy of God, confeſſing, with the greateſt Humility of Heart, that his Tranſgreſſions were not only more than he could bear, but even more than he could underſtand; "Cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults."

Whenever Men entertain Doubts of their own Sincerity and due Performance of religious Acts, it is extremely difficult to reaſon with their Fears and Scruples, and to diſpoſſeſs them of the Miſapprehenſions they have of their own State and Condition. Such Suggeſtions as bring Eaſe and Comfort to their Minds come ſuſpected, as proceeding from their own or their Friends' Partiality; and they are afraid to hope, leſt even to hope, in their deplorable Condition, ſhould

prove to be Preſumption, and aſſuming to themſelves more than in Reaſon or Juſtice they ought. But, when we can ſhew them Men of approved Virtue and Holineſs, whoſe Praiſe is in the Book of Life, who have ſtruggled with the ſame Fears, and gone through even the worſt of their Apprehenſions to the peaceful Fruits of Righteouſneſs; it helps to quicken both their Spirits and their Underſtanding, and at once to adminiſter Knowledge and Conſolation. And for this Reaſon we can never ſufficiently admire the Wiſdom of God, in ſetting before us the Examples of good Men in their loweſt and moſt imperfect State.

Had they been ſhewn to us only in the brighteſt Part of their Character, Deſpair of attaining to their Perfection might incline us to give over the Purſuit, by throwing a Damp upon our beſt Reſolutions: but when we ſee them riſing to Virtue and Holineſs from the ſame wretched Condition which we are in, and labouring under the ſame Difficulties, the ſame Anxieties and Torments of Mind; when we ſee their very Souls convulſed with the Pangs of Repentance, and their Faith almoſt ſinking under the Doubtfulneſs of their Condition; when we hear them cry to God in the Words of Anguiſh, not knowing how to pray, or in what Terms to lament their Sins; when we ſee this Nakedneſs of their Souls, and find they are like One of us; what

ſecret

ſecret Comfort muſt it give to an afflicted Spirit, what Support to a Mind oppreſſed with the Senſe of Guilt, to find in theſe great Examples what heavenly Joy and Peace often ſpring from the loweſt Depths of Sorrow and Woe! — And,

There is, indeed, with Reſpect to the Comfort and Security of a Sinner, a great Difference between Arguments drawn from general Reaſonings and Reflections, and thoſe which are ſuggeſted from the Experience and Practice of holy Men.

In the Caſe before us, if we conſider the Words of the Text without Regard had to the Perſon who ſpoke them, we may raiſe many Reflections from the great Variety of human Actions, and the complicated Nature of them, from the Short-ſightedneſs of the Underſtanding, and the Weakneſs and Imperfection of the Faculties, to ſhew how very hard it is, and almoſt impoſſible, for any one perfectly to underſtand his Errors: whence might be deduced the Reaſonableneſs of the Petition, "Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults;" becauſe where we cannot in particular recollect, there we can only in general lament our Iniquities; beyond this Probability we cannot go to determine the Method in which God will deal with Sinners. But if we take the Words as ſpoken by David, of the Sincerity of whoſe Repentance, and the Acceptance of it with God, there

is no Doubt, the Concluſions then will be much ſoller, and ſuch as cannot fail to refreſh the Soul of every languiſhing Penitent; for in This View, the Words fairly afford us theſe two Propoſitions:

I. That the Security and Efficacy of Repentance do not depend upon a particular Recollection of all our Errors.

II. That for ſuch Errors as we cannot recollect, a general Confeſſion and Repentance are full and ſufficient.

Theſe two Propoſitions contain the plain Doctrine of the Text; ſo plain, that I need not enlarge upon it.

But that we may not miſtake in the Application of it to ourſelves, and hope for Forgiveneſs whilſt we are willingly ignorant of our Sins, and, to ſave the Trouble and Pain of Recollection, endeavour to cover them all under general Ejaculations and Petitions for Mercy, I ſhall ſet before you of what Kind and Nature the Sins are, which we may juſtly call our SECRET Sins, and for the Expiation of which a general Confeſſion and Repentance will be accepted. — And,

1ſt, We may reckon among our SECRET Sins thoſe which our Liturgy has taught us to aſk Repentance and Forgiveneſs for, under the general Names of NEGLIGENCES and IGNORANCES. For Neglect of our Duty, and Negligence in diſcharging it, are two things; the

One

One arising from a Diſlike and Averſion of the Work, and attended with a Conſciouſneſs and Conſent of the Mind, (which muſt be known, when we, at any Time, omit it;) the Other proceeding commonly from Want of Thought, or Want of Diſpoſition, two Infirmities which we care not to accuſe ourſelves of, and yet from which we are ſeldom free: — inſomuch that, when we think ourſelves moſt ſecure of a good Diſpoſition and firm Reſolution to go through the ſeveral Particulars of our Duty, they often forſake us in the midſt of it, and we find ourſelves on a ſudden becalmed, our Inclinations grown faint and languid, and too weary of the Employment to ſupport us in the Proſecution of it.

Such Surprizes good Men have frequently complained of in their Devotions: they begin with Zeal and Fervency of Spirit, with Hearts and Affections up-lifted to God, till ſome chance Object diverts their Attention, ſome favourite Care ſteals into the Heart, and they both wander and are loſt in the Multiplicity of Objects and Imaginations which ſucceed each other, which ſurround and aſſault them; inſomuch that, when they return to their proper Object, they are as One that awaketh from a Dream.

Offences of this Kind are ſecret to us even whilſt we are committing them, the Mind not being conſcious to the Deluſion; and yet they are ſo frequent in every

Part of our Duty, that when we call ourſelves to the ſtricteſt Account, it is impoſſible to find their Number, or bring every ſingle Act to our Remembrance.

2dly, Sins of Ignorance are ſecret Sins likewiſe, as the very Name they are diſtinguiſhed by imports. "Where there is no Law, (ſays the Apoſtle) there is no Tranſgreſſion:" and therefore unavoidable Ignorance ſeems to be rather a Misfortune, than a Crime; and tho' it be dumb, and cannot ſpeak in its own Defence, yet its very Silence will be a ſtronger Plea in the Preſence of the Almighty, than all the laboured Excuſes which the Wit of knowing Sinners has invented.

In all Caſes where Men may be ſaid to offend thro' Ignorance, they muſt be equally inſenſible of the Crimes they commit, and the Ignorance they labour under; and therefore equally incapable of repenting particularly of their Sins, and of their Ignorance. For,

When Men venture boldly upon Actions, becauſe conſcious to themſelves that they know not whether they are going right or wrong, their Sin is Preſumption, and not Ignorance; and ſhould they chance to blunder into the right Way, it is much to be doubted, whether the Happineſs of their Miſtake will excuſe the Raſhneſs of their Attempts: at beſt, they have nothing to plead from Wiſdom and Prudence in the Choice of their Actions; the only Proof from Free-Agents of Merit and Deſert in the Sight of God. Such

Such Repentance, therefore, as This, muſt be numbered, not with our ſecret Faults, but with ſuch Sins, as being acted with Conſciouſneſs and Conſent, carry in them an allowed Contempt of the Majeſty and Authority of God: for if a Man thinks Virtue and Vice ſo indifferent, that he may venture to chuſe at Hazard which to follow, there wants no better Evidence, that his Heart is not right with God, who can with ſo much Coolneſs and Temper affront his Honour. But,

Though the Ignorance itſelf be preſumptuous, and is ſuch as, being conſcious to, we muſt certainly be accountable for; yet the Miſtakes, the Follies, and Sins it leads us to, may be unknown to us, both at the Time of our offending, and of our repenting: and whatever Aggravation they receive from the obſtinate Ignorance they proceed from, how much ſoever the Heinouſneſs of them may deſerve to be diſtinguiſhed in our Sorrow and Contrition; yet, ſince the Mind cannot reach the Knowledge of them, they can only be lamented under the general Character of SECRET Sins.

Nor is this the only Caſe in which our Sins partake of the Malice of the Will, and yet eſcape the Notice of the Underſtanding: For,

3dly, Nothing ſhews more the Corruption of the Will, or Diſinclination of the Heart to Virtue, than confirmed Cuſtoms and Habits of ſinning; and yet in

this Perfection of Vice we loſe the very Senſe and Feeling of Sin.

Habits grow from often-repeated Actions; and tho' at firſt they require diſtinct Acts of the Will to give them Being, yet at laſt we grow ſo perfect and ready in it, as not to want the Authority and Conſent of the Mind for the Execution of it: as Servants, who, by being often ſhewn their Duty, at laſt fall into the Practice of it without being called-on for it, and yet act as much under the Direction of their Maſters' Authority as when they were under their conſtant Inſtruction. Thus it is in Habits; the Mind, which is the governing Principle, reſts-ſtill, and the Work goes-on without being attended to.

Of many Inſtances give me leave only to mention one, which is That of common Swearers, and Blaſphemers of the Holy Name; a Vice in itſelf ſo prodigious, that no Aggravation can heighten it, nor Excuſe can leſſen it! and yet thoſe who are moſt guilty of this Sin are leaſt ſenſible of it: it is ſo familiar to them, that they are not conſcious when they offend. Blaſpheming is their Idiom, a Turn in their Way of ſpeaking, and Oaths the mere Expletives of their Language. And when every ſober Heart trembles to hear what they utter, they only are unconcerned, as only being ignorant of the Malice with which they defy the living God. (*)

(*) See Vol. viii. Page 76.

For

For all these things God will call Sinners into Judgment; in his Book they are noted, but yet when Sinners call themselves to Judgment, they only can tell that they have grievously offended; the Measure of their Iniquity they know not, nor the many Aggravations of it: and therefore the utmost that the sincerest Penitent can do, is to lament the Offences of his Heart and Tongue, which he is not able to remember, and to pray to God that He likewise will be pleased to blot out the Remembrance of them from before him.

4thly, The Apostle has advised us "not to be Partakers of other Men's Sins;" which shews that when Others sin, being led to it by our Influence, Example, or Encouragement, we share with them in the Guilt of their Iniquities.

How far our Influence spreads, to what Instances, and Degrees of Vice, how many we have seduced by our Example, or hardened by our Encouragement, is more than we can tell, and yet not more than we shall answer for.

Those who are thus entered in our Service, and sin under our Conduct, are but our Factors; they trade for us, as well as for themselves; and whatever their Acquirements are, we shall receive our due Proportion out of the Wages and Effects of their Sin. This is a Guilt that steals upon us without being perceived: it

grows upon us whilſt we ſleep, and is loading our Account even when our Bodies are in the Poſſeſſion of the Grave. The higher our Station, and the greater our Authority, the more Reaſon have we to fear being involved in this Kind of Guilt; becauſe in Proportion to our Authority will the Infection of our Example ſpread; and, as our Power is great, our Encouragement will be the more effectual; and ſome, perhaps, there may be, who ſhall appear not only for their own Sins, but for the Wickedneſs of the Age they lived in.

But then, on the other Side, (pardon me a ſmall Digreſſion,) Power, and Honour, and Riches, are great Means of Salvation in the Hands of a wiſe Man, who knows how to uſe them to the Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind. To him ſhall be added the Virtue and Religion, which grow up under his Influence and Protection: and how tranſporting will the Surpriſe be to ſuch happy Souls, when they ſhall find the Improvement of this and future Ages in religious Holineſs placed to their Account at the great Day, as being the genuine Offſpring of their Care and Solicitude, and unſhaken Fidelity in the Cauſe of God, and of Chriſt! — But,

5thly, The great Meaſure of Folly and Vanity and Self-love there is in the beſt of our Actions, is what ſeldom falls under our Notice; and yet from ſuch ſecret Errors who is free? We

We hardly know our own Hearts well enough to anſwer at all Times for the Integrity of our Intentions. How much of our Virtue and Religion is mere Reſpect to common Decency, and ariſes from no higher Spring than a Regard to our own Credit and Reputation, is more than we can certainly tell. When we are moſt eager in Purſuit of ſome good End, could we ſtop ſhort, and examine ourſelves fairly, we ſhould find perhaps that we were only gratifying ſome private Paſſion, and that none of the beſt, perhaps Malice and Revenge, or ſome other inordinate Deſire.

To this Account we may add the many vain Imaginations which are conceived in the Heart, though never brought to Life by Action, but die in the Womb, and are out of Remembrance. Such are the Ambitious Man's imaginary Scenes of Honour and Glory, formed and wrought up to a Kind of Life in a mere Deluſion of Thought: which, fantaſtical as they are in themſelves, do ariſe from real Pride and Vanity. Such the viſionary Enjoyment of Senſual Men, when the Thoughts traverſe all the forbidden Paths of Luxury and Wantonneſs; where, though the Phantom be airy and unſubſtantial, yet does this Dream of Senſuality derive itſelf from no imaginary Corruption, but from a real Diſtemper in the Mind, from inordinate Deſires and Affections. Such, again, is the ſecret An-

ger, ſuch the Malice of the Heart, which ſits brooding over envious or revengeful Deſigns, which it contrives within itſelf, and ſeems to execute upon its Enemies; and, for Want of Power or Opportunity for real Revenge, feeds itſelf with viewing the Execution of its Wrath, though only expreſſed in the Images of Fancy. (*) Harmleſs and innocent as this Revenge may ſeem, which ſpends itſelf in imaginary Miſchief only, yet it ſprings from the Root of Bitterneſs, and is too plain an Evidence that we hate one another. (‡)

Laſtly, When we come to repent of our Sins, many of them may be ſecret to us merely through the Weakneſs and Imperfection of the Memory, which cannot recollect all the various Paſſages of a vicious Life. Theſe Sins, however conſcious we have been of them heretofore, with Reſpect to our Repentance are as ſecret as if we had never known them, and can only be confeſſed and bewailed in general Terms.

Thus have I ſet before you the ſeveral Kinds of our ſecret Sins. One general Character there is which belongs to them all, namely, that they are ſuch as we CANNOT, not ſuch as we WILL NOT remember: for tho the Mercy of God will cover our Defects, when they are

(*) *Devorat Abſentes, Simulacraque cerea fingit,*
Et miſerum tenues in Jecur urgit Acus.

(‡) See Vol. xi. Page 171, &c.

are unavoidable, and ſuch as ariſe from our natural Weakneſs and Infirmity; yet we have no Reaſon to expect any Allowance, where we are wanting to ourſelves through Indolence and Indiſpoſition; where, to avoid the Trouble or the Anguiſh of Repentance, we cover our own Sins deceitfully. Such Hypocriſy will be no Plea in his Preſence, "who trieth the Heart and Reins, and ſpieth out all our Ways." But,

Secondly, We are to conſider what Guilt we contract by our ſecret Sins, leſt it ſhould be thought that the Sins which eſcape our Knowledge ought not to burden our Conſcience.

Where there is no Guilt, there needs no Remiſſion; and if we cannot in Juſtice be charged with our ſecret Sins, there is no Senſe in the Pſalmiſt's Petition, "Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults." In another Place he has told us, "that God ſets our Iniquities before him, and our ſecret Sins in the Light of his Countenance;" and the Day approaches, when "for all theſe things he will call us into Judgment."

In the Inſtances already ſet before you, we may obſerve, that our moſt ſecret Sins are ſometimes the moſt heinous. Thus it is in the Caſe of habitual Sins; we are too well acquainted with them to take particular Notice of them; they are the involuntary Motions of a ſecond Nature, and we are as little concerned to

count their Number, as we are the Beatings of our Pulſe. But ſhall this plead their Excuſe? Shall only fearful Sinners and modeſt Beginners be puniſhed? And ſhall the Height of Iniquity, becauſe it takes away all Shame and Senſe of Sin, take away likewiſe all Danger of Judgment? This can agree with no Rule of Juſtice or Equity; for by this Means the ſame Man will ſtand chargeable with the Guilt of his early Sins, ſuch as he committed before his Conſcience was quite hardened, and yet not accountable for the more enormous Crimes of ſinful Wickedneſs: as if the only Sin we could commit, were to be ſenſible of our Faults.

The ſame might be made appear in the other Inſtances; for every idle Word, how ſoon ſoever it ſlips out of our Memory, for every vain Imagination of the Heart, how ſoon ſoever it vaniſhes away, we ſhall "give an Account at the Day of Judgment." For the Guilt of Sin does not ariſe from the Power of our Memory, nor is it extinguiſhed by the Weakneſs of it; if it were, Forgetfulneſs would be the ſureſt Repentance; and Want of Thought and Reflection, which is ſo often repreſented in Scripture as an Aggravation of Sin, would be the Sinner's beſt Security. But, alas! though we forget, there is One who cannot; before whom our Iniquities are ever preſent; who will enter into Judgment with us, as well for the Sins which we

cannot

cannot remember, as for thoſe we cannot forget.

The Conſequence from the Whole is this: that ſince many of our Sins are ſecret to us, they can only be repented of in general; and ſince many of our ſecret Sins are very heinous, they muſt ſeriouſly and ſolemnly be repented of. By general Repentance then you are not to underſtand a ſlight or ſuperficial Repentance only. The Petition of the Pſalmiſt, "Cleanſe thou me from ſecret Faults," proceeded from a Heart deeply affected with a Senſe of its Guilt, and does not expreſs the Sentiments of One who was excuſing or leſſening his Faults; for he remembered, and ſo muſt we, that ſecret as our Faults are, yet God has placed them all "in the Light of his Countenance." "He knoweth our Simpleneſs, and our Faults are not hid from him."

Sermon

SERMON CCCXXXVII.

Sins of Infirmity.
Nature and Kinds of them.

Matt. xxvi. 41. "The Spirit indeed is willing, but "the Flesh is weak."

These are the Words of our Blessed Lord to his Disciples, the Night before his Passion; a Night which he himself spent in Prayer and Watching, and he had intreated his Disciples to tarry and watch with him. But their Hearts were dull, and their Eyes heavy; and notwithstanding all their best Endeavours to the contrary, Sleep stole upon them, and overcame them.

Hereupon, their indulgent Master, coming to them, thus gently rebuked them; "What! Could ye not watch with me one Hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into Temptation." Then follows, "The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak."

Which Words we understand with the Generality of Interpreters, as spoken in the Way of kind Excuse and Mitigation of their Fault, in not watching when it was their Duty to have done it, and when even common Prudence required it. In

In this Caſe, we can ſcarce acquit them of ſome Degree of Negligence & Want of Reſpect to their Maſter; but our Bleſſed Lord was pleaſed to put the mildeſt and moſt candid Conſtruction poſſible upon it.

The Night was far ſpent; Sleep came upon them unawares; and they were naturally heavy, not apprehending how much depended upon that critical Juncture. They intended no Affront or Diſreſpect to their Lord: they had a true and real, only not ſo lively and fervent a Concern for him as they ought to have had. Their Spirit truly was willing, and they meant well; but yet, for Want of quicker Sentiments, they failed in the Performance. It was natural Infirmity which prevailed over their Reſolutions, which overpowered their honeſt, but languid Endeavours. "The Spirit truly was willing, but the Fleſh was weak."

The Words, thus explained, naturally expreſs to us, in very proper and affecting Terms, the Nature or Eſſence of that Kind of Sins which we call SINS OF INFIRMITY, or Sins of human Frailty; and it is under this general View that I deſign to conſider them, abſtracting from their particular Occaſion. And, In ſpeaking to them, to this Purpoſe, I ſhall,

Firſt, Give ſome general Marks, of what muſt BY NO MEANS be allowed to be ranked under this Head.

And Secondly, What is truly and properly ſuch.

As to the general Marks, of what muſt BY NO MEANS be allowed to be ranked under this Head, we may ſafely affirm,

1ſt. That nothing can reaſonably be excuſed under That Name, which, at the Time of its Commiſſion, is KNOWN to be a Sin.

To do an Action, which at the ſame Time that the Perſon commits it, he knows and believes to be ſinful; is the proper Eſſence of preſumptuous Sin. And tho there are great Differences, and various Degrees, even of ſuch preſumptuous Offences; from whence ariſe proportionable Extenuations of Guilt; yet every Action of This Kind, is, in its Nature, evidently, in ſome Degree, a preſumptuous Tranſgreſſion. It plainly argues a Contempt of God, a Neglect of his Authority, or a Diſbelief of his Promiſes and Threats. It is with a clear and determined Choice ſetting aſide all the Motives of the Goſpel, and directly preferring (at leaſt at That particular Time) the Pleaſures of Sin before the Happineſs of Heaven.

2dly, Nothing can juſtly be called a Sin of Infirmity, which is contrary to the expreſs Letter of any of the Commandments.

The Reaſon is, becauſe no Man can be ignorant that ſuch an Action is a Sin; or if he be ignorant of it, it muſt be ſuch an Ignorance, as is itſelf a Sin of preſumptuous

ſumptuous Neglect; a wilful and affected Ignorance; an obſtinate refuſing to receive Inſtruction; a ſhutting his Eyes againſt the Sun, and deliberately chuſing Darkneſs rather than Light.

None of which Circumſtances affording any Manner of reaſonable Excuſe; it is evident (however otherwiſe a careleſs and corrupted World may be apt to judge,) it is evident, that no Action ought to be eſteemed by us as a mere Frailty, which is contrary to the plain Letter of any of thoſe Commandments, which God has declared to be the Conditions of Salvation; or which is clearly in the Number of thoſe Works of the Fleſh, concerning which St. Paul bids us "beware that no Man deceive us with vain Words; for that they who do ſuch things, ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God."

Scoffers at Religion, and Profaners of the Name of God by Oaths and Imprecations; Practiſers of Injuſtice and Unrighteouſneſs, Fraud and Deceits, in their Dealings one with another; the Unholy and the Impure, the Drunkard and the Fornicator, the Riotous and Exceſſive; would do well to conſider the Expreſſneſs and Earneſtneſs of this Declaration of the Apoſtle; and how little Reaſon they have to hope, that their Faults ſhall be excuſed among the Frailties and Infirmities of human Nature. — Again,

3dly, Nothing will admit of a juſt and ſufficient

Excuſe upon the Account of Infirmity, which a Man before-hand conſiders and deliberates with himſelf, whether it be a Sin or no.

The Reaſon is, becauſe Knowledge and Deliberation, imply Will and Choice; and, as a Perſon's chuſing what he fully KNOWS to be unlawful, is the HIGHEST Aggravation of preſumptuous Sin; ſo his conſenting to commit what upon Deliberation appears ANY WAY SUSPICIOUS and DOUBTFUL to him whether it be lawful or not, is ſtill always ſome Degree of wilful Sin; becauſe it is knowingly and deliberately venturing upon That, which he has Reaſon to fear will not be pleaſing to God; for "whatſoever is not of Faith, is Sin." And tho in all other things God is by no Means ſevere, but pities and compaſſionates us, and makes all poſſible Allowances; conſidering that we are but Duſt, frail and fallible Creatures: yet in the Matter of SINCERITY, of an upright and honeſt Intention; in this One Particular He makes no Abatements. But,

Secondly, I am to give ſome Account what is truly and properly a Sin of Infirmity, and what we may therefore hope will juſtly and reaſonaly be excuſed as ſuch. — And,

1ſt. A Sin of Infirmity is ſuch a Failing, as proceeds from ſome EXCUSABLE Ignorance. Not from ſuch Ignorance as is totally and abſolutely unavoidable; for

for in That Caſe, the Action is not any Sin at all: Nor yet on the other Side, muſt it proceed from wilful and groſsly careleſs Ignorance, ſuch as That always is which betrays Men into any great and enormous Crime; But it is what proceeds from ſuch Ignorance, as might indeed poſſibly in every particular Inſtance with great and conſtant Care have been avoided; and yet in general and upon the whole, through the Fallibility and Weakneſs of our Underſtandings, the Number of Prejudices by which our Judgments are diſturbed, and the Obſcurity and Difficulty which often happens to be in things themſelves; hardly any Man can be ſo diligent and cautious, as conſtantly to avoid it.

In great Crimes, and plain Tranſgreſſions of the Commands of God, this Rule (as before obſerved) can have no Place; becauſe no Man can innocently or excuſably be ignorant of the great and moſt important Inſtances of his Duty. But the Plea of Ignorance muſt always be underſtood to take-place ſo far only, as the Ignorance was not owing to the ill Diſpoſition and direct Choice of the Will. But,

2dly; A Sin of Infirmity may alſo be ſuch a Failing, as is owing to UNAVOIDABLE Surprize.

By unavoidable Surprize, we Mean not That which is ſtrictly and abſolutely unavoidable; but What, morally ſpeaking, conſidering the Multitude and Va-

riety of the Circumſtances of human Life, the Indiſpoſition of our Minds at certain Times, and the Suddenneſs of Objects ſtriking upon our Paſſions, cannot always be avoided, even by thoſe who always endeavour to pleaſe God.

Of this Kind are many ſmaller Irregularities of Paſſion, Wandrings of Thoughts in Prayer, careleſs and inconſiderate Words, vain Thoughts; Deſires and Inclinations to certain ſinful Actions, ineffectual indeed and not proceeding to the Commiſſion of the Crimes themſelves, but yet entertained with too many Degrees of Approbation.

Theſe, and ſuch like, are the Failings and Infirmities, incident more or leſs even to the Beſt of Men. Concerning which St. John affirms, that "if we ſay we have no Sin, we deceive ourſelves, and the Truth is not in us."

And the Scripture gives us Inſtances accordingly, of Noah's being ſurprized into an unhandſome Exceſs; of Moſes himſelf ſpeaking unadviſedly with his Lips; of Eliſha's falling into an undecent Diſcontent; of our Saviour's Diſciples weakly ſtriving for the Pre-eminence; of St. Paul's ſpeaking evil of the High Prieſt with too ſudden a Tranſport; and the like. All which are therefore to be reckoned in the Number of mere Failings and Infirmities; becauſe they were owing, not

ſo

ſo much to free Choice, as to unthinking Surprize.

Their general Nature is briefly deſcribed thus; that they are rather weak than wilful, having much more of Frailty than of Wilfulneſs in them. Something of Wilfulneſs they muſt have, otherwiſe they could not be imputed as Sins: but as the Degree of Wilfulneſs is ſmall in Compariſon, and the Frailty ſo much the greater; they have therefore their Denomination from their moſt prevailing Ingredient, and ſo are called Sins of Infirmity. They are ſuch, as by a very accurate Caution and Circumſpection might be avoided or prevented, and therefore they are Sins; but yet, becauſe ſuch exact Caution or Circumſpection is but rarely ſeen, and is not generally to be expected, therefore it is that the Sins of That Kind have the Favour of being numbered among human Frailties. They are a Kind of Failings, or Deviations, iſſuing from an honeſt and good Heart, and carrying no Malice-prepenſe, no premeditated Guile, nor ill Meaning in them; harmleſs almoſt as to the Matter of them, and without any bad Deſign. They are owing either to Inadvertency, Forgetfulneſs, Surprize, Strength of Paſſion, or to the Suddenneſs and Violence of an unlooked for Temptation. But this general Deſcription of them will not be ſo inſtructive or ſatisfactory perhaps, as a particular Detail may be, while we deſcend to ſpecial Caſes and Inſtances, which we chiefly intend. (Serm. 337.) Sins

Sins of Infirmity, then, may be branched out into three ſeveral Sorts, reſpecting either our Thoughts, our Words, or Actions.

In the firſt we are liable to offend two Ways, either in not thinking as we ought to think, or in thinking as we ought not.

Human Frailty is too often, and too ſadly felt, in what concerns the Government of the Thoughts. Who is there that does not often find Diſtraction, and Wanderings, and Dullneſs in Devotion, private or public; but public more eſpecially, as we there meet with more Objects to divert the Eyes, and to turn-off the Attention? There is nothing which a Man has leſs under Command than his own Thoughts in ſuch Caſes. He may be very devout at firſt, and deſign to be ſo throughout, and yet be thrown-off, in an Inſtant, without obſerving it immediately; and when he does obſerve it, he knows not how it came to him, but that it is like his waking from a Dream.

This Kind of Non-attention, or this Abſence of Thought, in religious Exerciſes, ſo far as it is a Sin (for it is not ſo always,) is, generally ſpeaking, a Sin of Infirmity, and no more. And it is then only to be reckoned among wilful Sins, when a Man makes a Habit of it, and ſlothfully ſubmits to it, without ſtriving againſt it; or, when it carries ſome Contempt of

the

the Service with it, arising from some vicious Principle of the Mind. — Again,

Besides the Sin of Infirmity now mentioned, we may name some others reducible to the same Head; such as not thinking often enough, or highly enough, of God and his good Providence; not having him constantly in our Thoughts, nor setting him before our Eyes; not attending to his Calls, not regarding his Judgments, nor being duly thankful for his Mercies, and the like. As to Omissions of this Kind, more or less, we offend all; and such Offences we may hope, will rise no higher in Account than pitiable Infirmities.

To these we may add, the not thinking how to lay hold of, and to improve any Opportunities we meet with of doing good in the World; and this, through Dulness, through Inadvertency, or Forgetfulness: for, if we wilfully and designedly let-slip the Opportunity offered us, and despise the Invitation, the Sin is then wilful, and the Offence presumptuous.

Among Sins of Infirmity belonging to this Head, may be reckoned some Kinds of Unbelief, as both Belief and Unbelief respect the inward Thoughts of the Heart. Want of Faith or Trust in God's Word, or his Promises, in some timorous Minds, may justly pass for a Sin of Infirmity. Such was the Sin of Zacha-

tias, in doubting of the Truth of the Angel's Meſſage to him; and for ſuch Unbelief of his, he was ſtruck dumb, and continued ſo, not able to ſpeak for a Seaſon.

Our bleſſed Lord often reproved his Diſciples for the like Want of Faith, or Truſt, "O ye of little Faith," and the like. Several of God's true Servants under the Old Teſtament betrayed ſometimes the like Diffidence and Doubtfulneſs. Moſes, in his exceſſive Shyneſs and Modeſty, durſt not undertake to ſpeak before Pharaoh, though he had God's Commiſſion for doing it: and Jonas the Prophet diſcovered the like Backwardneſs, as to the Errand he was ſent upon to the Ninevites. Theſe are Inſtances of human Frailty, in Men otherwiſe very pious and religious.

Thomas' Unbelief was ſomewhat worſe, and was carried further. It was a ſtrange Inſtance of Obſtinacy to reſolve to believe nothing but what he ſhould ſee and feel. This Fault of his can hardly come under the Head of Infirmity; except it were becauſe there was ſomething very particular in the Temper of the Man, which might render it the more excuſable in him. But Mary's Want of Faith in Reſpect to our Lord's raiſing up her Brother Lazarus, before ſhe ſaw it done, is a proper Inſtance of a Sin of Infirmity, and falls under this Head.

Many timorous Perſons, though otherwiſe very religious

ligious and devout, are apt to offend in this Kind; not relying upon God's good Providence, nor repoſing their Truſt in him with ſuch Confidence as they ought. They deſpond and ſink in the Day of Adverſity more than becomes them, forgetting that the very "Hairs of their Head are all numbered;" or as tho they had never read, that not ſo much as a "Sparrow falleth to the Ground" but by the Order, or with the Permiſſion at leaſt, of their Heavenly Father.

Hitherto, I have conſidered ſuch Sins of Infirmity as reſpect the inward Thoughts, in ſuch Caſes in which we do not think as we ought to think.

There is another of the ſame Head, which is, the thinking as we ought not. The former is a Sin of Omiſſion only, this of Commiſſion, both reſting in the Mind. When we are thinking of this World only, ſuppoſe in the Time of ſolemn Devotion, or pious Inſtruction, inſtead of thinking of a better, as but too many are apt to do: This, we hope, may paſs for a Sin of Infirmity, if not choſen by us, nor deſignedly indulged.

Sometimes profane blaſphemous Thoughts will ariſe up in Men's Minds: but if they be checked as ſoon as obſerved, and are not conſented to, they are, at moſt, no more than Sins of Infirmity, owing generally to bodily Indiſpoſition. The ſame we ſay, even of un-

chaſt and malicious Thoughts, if they are only ſhort and tranſient, and do not gain our Conſent, but are condemned by us as ſoon as perceived; they are then either Sins of Infirmity only, or not Sins at all. For what the Will, or Choice, has no Share in, is not imputable to us as a Fault; it may be our Misfortune; and from this Evil, a great Benefit may accrue to us; as our Virtue is hereby exerciſed and approved. (*)

The firſt Riſings of a Thought into the Mind, are very little, if at all, in our Power: we are moſtly paſſive in them, and are no further accountable for them, than as we afterwards make them our's by indulging them, and taking Pleaſure in them: then, indeed, ſuch evil Thoughts become Crimes, and grow-up from Infirmities into wilful and preſumptuous Sins.

The firſt Emotions of the Paſſions are as little in our Power as the other. A ſudden Fear or Aſtoniſhment, the firſt Kindlings of Wrath and Anger, or the like; theſe a Man cannot help: they come upon him unawares, and take him by Surprize. So far he is innocent; and if they dwell with him a little Time, they may amount to Sins of Infirmity; but if they are further indulged, as if Anger, ſuppoſe, is ſuffered to grow into Rage, or to ſettle into Malice, it then becomes a wilful and deadly Sin.

Too much Warmth and Eagerneſs, in ſome Inſtan-

(*) James i. 2, 3. ces,

ees, is a Sin of Infirmity. Such, we ſuppoſe, was Peter's Eagerneſs, when he drew his Sword, without ſtaying for his Lord's Commiſſion. Perhaps, alſo, St. Paul (as already obſerved) was too warm and eager, when he ſo ſharply rebuked the High Prieſt; correcting himſelf, however, preſently after, making an Apology for what he had ſaid.

Exceſſive Fondneſs, in ſome Caſes, is another Inſtance of Sins of Infirmity. Fond Parents, eſpecially, have great Reaſon to hope that their partial and often fooliſh Fondneſs, ſhall paſs for no worſe; otherwiſe they would many Times have a great deal to anſwer for. (*) David's Fondeſs for his Son Abſalom was very highly extravagant, and ſuch as is not to be juſtified upon any Principle of Religion or Reaſon: nevertheleſs, it muſt admit of a fair Excuſe, upon the Score of Infirmity; it was no wilful Sin. But Eli's Indulgence and Remiſſneſs towards his Sons, whom he, as a Magiſtrate, ought to have corrected, being more deliberate, and of much worſe Tendency, That was charged upon him as a heinous Crime, and both he and his Poſterity remarkably ſuffered for it.

To this Head we may refer Credulity, or overhaſty Belief, as being often a Sin of Infirmity, and per-

(*) *Nocet Indulgentia Matrum. — Deteriores omnes ſumus Licentiâ.* Serm. CCCXXXVII.

pertaining only to the Mind. Many an honeſt and good Man may be too credulous in believing idle Stories, and falſe Reports; when he ought to be upon his Guard. Thus the Man of God ſuffered himſelf to be deceived by the lying Prophet of Bethel, and paid dear for his Credulity; though, it is conceived, his Sin was no more than a Sin of Infirmity: he meant well, and had an honeſt Mind.

To the ſame Head may be referred over-great Carefulneſs, or Anxiety, in Reſpect to worldly things. It is to be hoped, that much of this Kind may be allowed to paſs among our pitiable Failings, and bear no harder a Name than that of Sins of Infirmity. Martha, a very good Woman in the main, was yet careful and cumbered about many things more than ſhe ſhould have been: and ſhe received a gentle Rebuke for it from our bleſſed Lord. It was a Sin to be ſo over-careful and anxious for Trifles, to the Neglect of better things: but ſhe did not conſider it; ſhe intended well, and thought even her Siſter to blame for not doing as ſhe did, though ſhe was much better employed.

Hitherto I have conſidered Sins of Infirmity as reaching no further than the Mind, reſting in Thought only. I proceed now,

2dly, To a ſecond Article, or Head of Diſcourſe, [viz.] reſpecting our Speech. — And here,

Many

Many are our Sins of Infirmity reducible to this Head. "If any Man offend not in Word, the ſame is a perfect Man," as St. James juſtly obſerves. But where ſhall we find ſuch a Perſon? or has there ever been ſuch an One, our bleſſed Lord only excepted, who had no Sin, nor was "Guile found in his Mouth?"

Many are the Offences of the Tongue: our greateſt Comfort is, that ſeveral of them may paſs for Frailties only; and happy will it be for us, if we go no further.

Moſes, (as we have ſeen) one of the beſt Men that ever lived, ſtands charged in Scripture, as once ſpeaking "unadviſedly with his Lips," in an Affair of high Conſequence. It was a ſudden Paſſion that betrayed him into it, and he had no Ill-meaning; it was a Sin of Infirmity. And doubtleſs, even Peter's Denial of his Lord was rather weak than wilful: he was ſurprized into it, had forgot himſelf, and had not yet Time to recollect. He had a very honeſt Heart, and had Courage enough at another Time, even to fight and die for his Lord: And as ſoon as ever he perceived how meanly he had behaved in denying him, he was ſadly ſtruck with it, and wept bitterly for it. All theſe Circumſtances plead in his Favour, and make his Sin appear rather as a Sin of Infirmity, than a preſumptuous Sin.

We would willing hope, that haſty, heedleſs Swear-

ing, or taking God's Name in vain, in thoſe who had unhappily got a Habit of it from their Childhood, may be but a Sin of Infirmity, for ſome Time: but to ſuch as perceive it, and continue it, and uſe not all proper Means and Care to get the better of it, and to break the evil Habit, to them it is wilful and deadly.

Telling of Lies we do not reckon among the Sins of Infirmity; it is, generally, at leaſt, a voluntary choſen thing: but varying a little from ſtrict Truth, or adding to it as is ſometimes done, undeſignedly, haſtily, or forgetfully, in the making a Report, if it be in things of ſlight Conſequence; that may be numbered among human Frailties. (*)

Angry and paſſionate Speeches may moſtly fall under the Head of Infirmities: but bitter Invectives, and irritating, injurious Reflections, made cooly and deliberately, are without Excuſe.

There are ſometimes ſharp Contentions between very good Men, and very good Friends, where both Sides mean well, but differ in Opinion or Judgement. Such was the ſharp Contention between Paul and Barnabas, in which the latter appears to have been blameable, in favouring his Kinſman Mark more than became him to do, where the public Intereſt of the Church lay at Stake: but this was his Infirmity; and even the beſt of Men will be ſubject to human Frailties.

(*) See Vol. viii. Page 349.

It

It would be endleſs to enumerate all the Offences of the Tongue, which Men are liable to. It is a difficult Matter to talk much, and well: great Talkers offend often; whilſt they who ſay the leaſt, are generally the moſt ſafe, as well as the moſt innocent. (*)

Yet there may be a Fault ſometimes in being too reſerved, ſhy, and ſilent: as when a Man neglects to exhort or reprove his Neighbour, as Occaſions offer, or when he patiently hears the Name of God diſhonoured, or an innocent abſent Man abuſed, without any Endeavour to defend either. Such Reſerve, in ſome Caſes, may riſe no higher than a Sin of Infirmity. But, for the moſt Part, we may more juſtly call it a wilful Neglect, betraying Meanneſs of Spirit, at leaſt, or ſomething worſe. But,

3dly, The moſt material Article of all, is That which concerns our outward Actions. And here alſo we may offend two Ways; either as neglecting to do what we ought, or as doing what we ought not.

Sins of Infirmity are moſtly ſeen in our manifold Omiſſions and Neglects, either forgetting what Duties are incumbent on us, or performing them but in Part. Who can ſay how oft he offendeth in this Kind? Who can ſay that he hath acquitted himſelf perfectly in

(*) See Note (*), Vol. viii Page 221. Ditto, 312, and 313.

in every Inſtance of Duty towards God, and towards his Neighbour? to his King or to his Country; to his Family or Relations; to his Friends and to his Enemies; to High and Low; to Rich and Poor; to every Man he hath any Relation to, or Concern with?

Hard would be our Circumſtances, were we to give a ſtrict Account of all our Omiſſions; or if much the greater Part of them were not kindly over-looked by an all-merciful God, as pitiable Frailties. — Yet let not any Man ſet-light by Omiſſions.

Wilful Omiſſions of known Duties, are wilful and preſumptuous Sins: and there are ſome Kinds of Omiſſions which will be always charged as wilful, and will be enough to exclude us the Kingdom of Heaven; particularly, if we omit or neglect to worſhip God, or do good to Man, as our Opportunities and Abilities permit. If we neglect to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked, or to viſit the ſick, or to comfort the afflicted; our Bleſſed Lord himſelf hath told us, that we ſhall not be admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven: and further, if we neglect or omit to forgive our Enemies, we can have no Forgiveneſs at the Hands of God.

Briefly then, Tho' many of our Omiſſions or Neglects, amount only to Sins of Infirmity, yet there are Sins of Omiſſion which are both wilful and dangerous, as any other Sins are, and which will admit of no Excuſe on any Pretence of human Frailty. There-

Therefore further, — Of Sins of Commiſſion, the doing what we ought not to do.

Sins of this Kind are moſt wilful: but ſome there are which may be juſtly looked upon as Sins of Infirmity. Drunkenneſs in righteous Noah, once only, might be a Sin of Infirmity. He was not aware, perhaps, of the Effects of Wine: he had not till then had Experience of it: he was overtaken unawares, and ſurprized into it. We know not whether the like favourable Excuſe may not be admitted for others who may once unhappily fall into the like Exceſs unawares.

But, generally ſpeaking, as the World now is, a Man can ſcarce be ſurprized into ſuch Exceſs, or overtaken without his Fault. Many, perhaps, will ſay, that they did not, or do not, deſign to drink ſo far as to Exceſs: This may be true; but ſtill they are wilful Sinners, for not deſigning and reſolving to be conſtantly ſober, and for not uſing the proper Means to avoid Temptation. — But further,

Some have been weak enough to plead human Frailty even for great and heinous Offences, ſuch as Fornication, Adultery, and the like: but all ſuch Pretences are vain. Sins of this Kind never are, never can be, committed without great Degrees of Wilfulneſs.

It is not Surprize, it is not Inadvertency, which brings a Man into the Commiſſion of ſuch Sins: but

they are choſen and premeditated Sins, and a Man is drawn into them through Luſt, and Wantonneſs, by ſeveral Steps and Degrees, with full Conſent of a depraved Will. Slight Offences a Man may be drawn into by Surprize or Incogitancy; but hardly into the great Ones. The Mind ſtarts, and Conſcience generally gives the Alarm before-hand, that a Man muſt take ſome Pains with himſelf, generally, before he can reconcile himſelf to any great and enormous Vice. Such Offences, therefore, are not Sins of Infirmity, but they are deliberate, and preſumptuous, Sins.

If it be pleaded, that the Object is inviting, and the Temptation ſtrong, violent, and irreſiſtible; this is juſt ſuch a Plea as any common Fellon might make for invading Property, or making an Aſſault. No Doubt but that ſuch Perſons are violently tempted to commit ſuch Outrages, or they would not do them. The Temptation, probably, in that Caſe, is ſtronger than in the other; for a Fellon does it at his utmoſt Peril, and ventures his Life in it; whereas it is more than probable, that if Fornication or Adultery were as ſeverely prohibited, and puniſhable by the Laws of the Land, it would be found that the Men of Pleaſure could command themſelves, and reſiſt the Temptation; as generally they do, in ſuch Caſes, where the Law makes all Violence and Outrage, capital: but they are encouraged,

couraged, after they have laid aside the Fear of God, by the Hopes of Impunity from Man; and then being got above Reſtraint, they commit all Uncleanneſs with Greedineſs.

There are ſome other Kinds of Sins for which human Infirmity is ſometimes pleaded, but with very little Reaſon. Acts of Hoſtility, Aſſaults, Beating, Wounding, and the like. It is ſaid, by Way of Excuſe, that they were provoked to it, and that Fleſh and Blood could not forbear in ſuch Caſes. But theſe are Pretences only, of vain Men, who have not yet learned any thing of Chriſtian Meekneſs, but who have Hearts too proud and ſtubborn to ſubmit to the Rules of the Goſpel. Sins of Infirmity, properly ſo called, are Sins of quite another Kind than thoſe we have now mentioned. — Again,

Good Men run ſometimes into exceſſive Warmth and Zeal in the Diſcharge of a Duty, or Execution of an Office; they may be guilty of indiſcreet Rigours, and puſh things too far; may be ſo afraid of not doing good enough, that they will even over-do, and be too officious, or too ſevere, exceeding the Bounds of Chriſtian Prudence, and doing Hurt, when they intended Good.

Theſe, and other the like Indiſcretions of good Men, are properly Sins of Infirmity, owing to Inad-

vertency or Surprize, or to ſome natural Weakneſs adhering to their particular Temper, Complexion, Conſtitution, or the like.

How our State and Condition towards God, is affected by them, is ſufficiently clear, from the Manner of their preſent Diſcuſſion; and alſo what Kind of Management, on our Part, may be prudent and proper in Regard to them: [viz.] that, before God, we are no further chargeable for the Frailties of our Nature, than the Strength of it will permit; – and that, with Regard to ourſelves, we be particularly heedful not to charge That to the Frailty of our Nature which is ever of our own Growth and Encouragement, – and that where, in any Inſtance, we find ourſelves more defective, that there we take the more eſpecial Heed, guard with the greater Care; and ſtrengthen, by every Means of Grace, whatever is defective in us.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXXXVIII.

On preſumptuous Sins. Nature, and Heinouſneſs of them.

Pſal. xix. 13. "Keep thy Servant alſo from pre-
"ſumptuous Sins; leſt they get the Dominion o-
"ver me: ſo ſhall I be undefiled, and innocent
"from the great Offence."

In the Verſe preceding the Text, David puts up his Petition for Pardon of all the Failures and Errors of his Life paſt, even of ſuch as had eſcaped his Notice, or had ſlipped out of his Memory: "Who (ſays he) can underſtand his Errors? Cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults." (*) But beſides thoſe ſlighter Offences, he was aware alſo of the Offences of a more heinous Nature, and therefore immediately ſubjoins a Prayer againſt them likewiſe: "Keep thy Servant alſo from preſumptuous Sins: leſt they get the Dominion over me; ſo ſhall I be undefiled and innocent from the great Offence."

The Words, as they run in this new Tranſlation, are not difficult to underſtand, and ſo will need the

(*) The preceding Sermon.

leſs

leſs opening. Indeed, in the Original they have been thought capable of a very different Verſion, and conſequently of as different a Senſe; but I ſhall not take Notice of Niceties of this Kind, which would be dry and uſeleſs. The Senſe which they bear in our Tranſlation is a very good One, and is judiciouſly preferred before any other. I proceed, therefore, to conſider the Matter contained in it: and in diſcourſing upon it, I ſhall take this Method.

I. I ſhall treat of Sins in general, their Nature, Kinds, and Meaſures.

II. On preſumptuous Sins in particular, with the Malignity and Danger of them, and the Concern we ought to have to ſtand clear of them. — And then,

III. Cloſe all with proper Advice and Directions how to avoid them. And,

I. I am to treat of Sins in general, their Nature, Kinds, and Meaſures.

Sin is rightly defined a Tranſgreſſion of God's Law: and is either the doing of ſomething which God has forbidden, or the leaving undone what God has commanded.

The doing what we ought not to do, is called a Sin of Commiſſion: and the not doing what we ought, is ſtyled a Sin of Omiſſion. In the One, we commit a Treſpaſs; in the Other, we neglect a Duty; and either Way

Way we ſin. Sins of either Kind may differ in their Degrees of greater and leſs, according to their different Matter, Circumſtances, and Aggravations.

The Stoic Philoſophers, and ſome few of the leſs conſiderate Chriſtians, have pretended, that all Sins are equal. Their Reaſons for it are not worth the mentioning; for the Conceit is ſo groundleſs, and ſo repugnant to the common Senſe of Mankind, that barely to ſpeak of it, is ſufficiently to expoſe it, as it carries its own Confutation with it. For a Man muſt be very weak to imagine, that Theft, ſuppoſe, is as great a Sin as Murder; or Fornication as high a Crime as Adultery; or the telling of a Lie as wicked a thing as Robbery, Sacrilege, or Incendiary. Every One is ſenſible of the Difference between high Crimes and trivial Offences; between the Sins of the firſt Magnitude, and ſlight Tranſgreſſions. Our Saviour diſtinguiſhes them very fully, comparing the one to a Mote, the other to a Beam in the Eye; and ſharply rebukes the Phariſees for "ſtraining at a Gnat, and ſwallowing Camels;" (i.e) for their making Conſcience of leſſer Sins, and at the ſame Time practiſing greater.

Seeing, therefore, that Sins are not equal, but differing in Degree, as the Text intimates, The next Inquiry is, what makes the Difference, and by what Rules or Meaſures we may judge and diſtinguiſh of it.

There are two Considerations to be taken in, which seem to be the principal in determining of the Greatness of any Sin. One is the Matter of the Sin itself, or the mischievous Tendency of it: the other is, the Degree of Malice or Wilfulness in the Person committing it.

Moral Evil, the same with Sin, is the choosing something which is naturally evil, or is of a mischievous Tendency. The Case is plain in all Instances prohibited by the Law of Nature; and, as to Cases prohibited by the positive Law of God, the Prohibition brings them under the same Rule; for then a Man cannot break through the Prohibition, without affronting, contemning, and disobeying Almighty God: which is naturally evil, and of evil Tendency; it is Rebellion against the Creator, which is of pernicious Example, and carries many mischievous Consequences in it, with Respect to Man's temporal and eternal Welfare.

And First, The first Rule whereby we judge of the Heinousness of a Sin is by the mischievous Tendency of it. Thus, to instance in Matters of a moral Nature; Stealing is not so hurtful as Maiming; nor is Maiming so mischievous as Murder; nor is Murder of an Equal so mischievous as the Murder of a Superior, a Magistrate, a Father, or the Prince we are under.

In

In Matters of a positive Nature, neglecting to defend or to maintain the Gospel, when commanded, is a grievous Sin; because the Salvation of Myriads may be concerned in it: but the opposing of the Gospel is much worse, and of greater Malignity.

Neglecting the Sacraments, or other solemn Ordinances of God, is a great Sin, as it is slighting God's Goodness, affronting his Authority, and setting a very ill Example: but rejecting them utterly, or contemning them, is high Profaneness, and of most pernicious Tendency, as it is striking at all instituted Religion directly, and at Morality in Consequence; and so, in the last Result, at the general Happiness of Mankind here and hereafter. — This may serve to explain what we mean by the evil Tendency of any Sin.

The other Consideration is, the Degree of Wilfulness in the Person committing it.

Whatever Mischief a Man may do, he is no further chargeable with it, than as he made it his Choice; no further than he knew what he was doing, and wilfully chose it. A Man that is insane may do a great Deal of Mischief, but in him it is no Sin. The like may be said of Men of Incapacity, of Fools or Idiots.

Where there is no Reason, nor Choice, there can be no Sin. And supposing a Man, under the Use of Reason, to do Mischief, either being compelled to it, or

not knowing that it is a Mischief, or not considering it, or not designing it; These will be all to many Articles in his Favour, either to acquit him entirely of Blame, or to excuse and extenuate, in Proportion to the Degree of the Necessity he was under.

Hence it is, that Divines have distinguished Sins into three Kinds; [viz] of Ignorance, of Infirmity, and Presumption. The Will is supposed to concur more or less in all, otherwise they could not be Sins, but they have their Names from what is most prevailing and predominant in each.

If there be more of Ignorance than of Wilfulness in it, it is a Sin of Ignorance: — if there be more of Infirmity than Wilfulness in it, it is a Sin of Infirmity: but if there be more of Wilfulness than of either, or both the former, it is then a WILFUL Sin; and is what the Text calls "presumptuous." But, To say something more particular of each:

1st. Of a Sin of Ignorance: Such was the Sin of Abimelech, when he took unto him Abraham's Wife, not knowing her to be his Wife, but supposing her to be his Sister only.

What he did, was with an upright Heart, so far; ignorantly consenting to Adultery: but yet, because he might have made further Inquiry, and might have informed himself better, if he had had Patience,

and

and not been too precipitate; he was therefore not wholly innocent: a Sin he was guilty of, but a Sin of Ignorance; and therefore he found Mercy at the Hands of God.

A ſecond Example, but more approaching to a Sin of Preſumption, was St. Paul's perſecuting the Church of Chriſt. He did it ignorantly, and in Unbelief, out of an honeſt and well-meant Zeal: but he ſinned in ſo doing, and grievouſly too; becauſe he had had ſeveral Opportunities of knowing better; and he had ſeen enough of the miraculous Powers of the Church, to convince a Man of his Education and Abilities, if he had duly attended to them.

However, becauſe his Ignorance in that Caſe was not entirely affected, nor owing to Envy, Malice, or other corrupt Principle; his Sin, in that Inſtance, may paſs among the Sins of Ignorance, (as he himſelf expreſſes it) rather than among the Sins of Preſumption: it was blamable, but pitiable at the ſame Time; for Ignorance leſſens and extenuates a Fault, more or leſs, according as the Ignorance was more or leſs wilful.

If the Ignorance had been perfectly involuntary and unavoidable, it would have entirely acquitted him of all Blame. "If you were blind, (ſays our Lord to the Phariſees) you ſhould have no Sin." But when the Ignorance is in ſome Meaſure voluntary, and in

some Measure involuntary, there it does not take off the Guilt entirely, but lessens and extenuates it in Proportion: "He that knoweth not his Lord's Will, and did commit things worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes."—Such is the Nature and Description of a Sin of Ignorance. Therefore,

2dly, Of Sins of Infirmity, owing to the Frailty of the Flesh, or the Impetuosity of the Affections, as the former is to the Blindness of the Understanding.

Much might be usefully said upon this Head, to distinguish them from Sins of Presumption, and to prevent People's deceiving themselves with the Plea of Infirmity, where they have really no Right or Title to it. But the Subject is copious, and hath, (in great Measure) been already done. (*) It may be sufficient, therefore, to have hinted what the Name imports, and to pass on to Sins of scarlet Dye. [viz]

3dly, Sins of Presumption; such as have more of Wilfulness and Malice-prepense, than of Ignorance or Infirmity in them; when a Man sins with a High hand, against the Dictates of Reason, and the Checks of Conscience; not merely thro Ignorance or human Frailty, but wilfully, thro the Stubbornness and Perverseness of a depraved distorted Will.

It will be easy to distinguish this malignant Kind of presumptuous Sin from either of the former.

(*) In the preceding Subject.

All

All premeditated Offences, tho' the Matter of them ſhould appear ſlight, come under the Name and Notion of preſumptuous Sins: for wilful Diſobedience to a plain Command, tho' in a ſmall Matter, is no ſmall Tranſgreſſion. This we ſee in the Caſe of our firſt Parents; The tafting of the forbidden Fruit was ſeemingly a ſlight Matter; but yet, becauſe the Command was expreſs, and the Diſobedience wilful and preſumptuous, God reſented the Contempt, and puniſhed it with a very remarkable and memorable Severity.

Among preſumptuous Sins, we muſt reckon all thoſe which are of a high and flagrant Nature; ſuch as Murder, Adultery, Perjury, Sacrilege, Fornication, Robbery, Extortion, Oppreſſion, Blaſphemy, and the like; becauſe thoſe Sins are in their own Nature vile and miſchievous, and known to be ſo; that a Man cannot be ſuppoſed to fall into them through mere Ignorance, or Infirmity, but through the Wilfulneſs and Stubbornneſs of a depraved Will.

As to Neglects or Omiſſions of Duty, many of theſe alſo are reducible to the Claſs of high and preſumptuous Sins; ſuch as cuſtomary Neglect of known and plain Duties; – abſenting from public Worſhip, without Neceſſity; – living in conſtant Contempt or Neglect of the Holy Communion; – refuſing the common Offices of Humanity and Chriſ-

tian Charity, when we ſee proper Occaſion for the Exerciſe of them; – neglecting to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked, or to commiſerate and aſſiſt the afflicted, in Proportion to our Abilities.

Theſe Acts of Mercy are ſo much the Tokens and Properties of our Chriſtian Profeſſion, and are ſo ſtrongly inſiſted upon as Matters of indiſpenſible Duty, quite thro both Teſtaments; that we can neither plead Ignorance nor Infirmity for our Neglect, or Refuſal of them. Omiſſions of this Kind are wilful, preſumptuous, condemning: ſo our Bleſſed Lord himſelf intimates, where he tells us, that the Articles of Inquiry at the Day of Judgment will be chiefly on theſe Heads; and Men ſhall be either acquitted or condemned according to their Obſervance or Neglect of them.

II. Of the Malignity and Danger of preſumptuous Sins, and the Care and Concern with which we ought to ſtand clear of, and avoid them.

We may obſerve of holy David, in this Pſalm, how he prays, that God would pardon his ſmaller Sins, and cleanſe him, by remitting, or not imputing them to him. But as to thoſe greater, preſumptuous Sins, he begs to be wholly kept back from them, and to be undefiled with them. He ſpeaks of them alſo as amounting to a great Tranſgreſſion, and which alone could debar him of the Satisfaction of having an upright Heart and a good Conſcience. His

His Errors and Infirmities, he believed, God would paſs-by and over-look, upon his general Confeſſion and Repentance: but of preſumptuous Sins he was greatly afraid, being ſuch as might make a fatal Breach between God and him, hard to be made up and reconciled; nor were his Fears in this Caſe, at all unreaſonable and groundleſs, if we conſider the malignant Qualities and miſchievous Effects of any One's thus ſinning preſumptuouſly. For,

1ſt. Preſumptuous Sins ſpring from the Corruption of the Heart, from ſome evil Luſt or Affection, ſome Predominancy of Pride, Avarice, or Voluptuouſneſs. Men will not run upon Sins of this Kind, to provoke Almighty God wilfully, and daringly, till their Sins have taken ſtrong hold of them, and the World hath eſtranged their Hearts, in a great Meaſure, from him. It is holding-out the Banners of Defiance, and entering into a Kind of open War or Rebellion againſt Heaven. It is "thundering with a Voice like God;" and "provoking the Lord to Jealouſy, as if we were ſtronger than He."

While a Man has Ignorance or Surprize to plead in Excuſe for himſelf, his Heart may ſtill be right with God; but when he wilfully and preſumptuouſly offends, it is very plain that his Heart is then alienated, and that he has made an Alliance with the World, in Oppoſition to God. (Serm. 338) 2dly

2dly, We may consider, further, that, after sinning in this Manner, and in this Degree, it is hard, very hard, to repent.

We see this in common Friendships one with another. While a Man knows that he intended no Ill to a Friend, but has unwarily done him a Prejudice, loving and respecting him all the Time; he easily returns, and with an open Countenance makes his Apology, and, with much humble Confidence, looks-up for Forgiveness: but, if he has acted against his Friend with Malice-prepense, and has designedly affronted and injured him; he grows sullen and shy, and perhaps shuns the Acquaintance ever after.

There is something of the like Affection left upon the Mind of a presumptuous Sinner with Respect to God. He, from that Instant, contracts a strange Aversion to him; he is afraid to approach him, conscious to himself, that he has been acting treacherously; nay, and perhaps strongly inclined, if not resolved, even to do so again; at least not fully resolved against it. He has therefore little or no Heart to pray to God, or to ask Pardon of him, except it be in a slight superficial Manner, as Words of Course. By Degrees the Breach grows wider between God and him; and he stands-off more and more, til at length he renounces, in a Manner, all further Acquaintance with his Maker. This

This is often the Reſult of giving-way, at firſt, to preſumptuous Sins. — But,

3dly, Suppoſing that a Man relents ſoon after, and is diſpoſed to repent heartily, and turn to God; yet it will be difficult for him ſo to heal the Breach which thoſe Sins have made, as to come with Delight, and humble Confidence, to his God, as before. The Remembrance of his Sins of Unfaithfulneſs will, for ſome Time, bring a Cloud over his Mind; he will, of Courſe, be full of Fear, Doubtfulneſs, and Anxiety; hardly knowing how to truſt himſelf at all, hardly daring to look up with Cheerfulneſs to God for the preſent; much leſs hoping for his future Favour.

I do not know a more affecting, or more melancholy, Example of what we are now mentioning, than David himſelf. From the Time he fell into preſumptuous Sins, in the Matter of Uriah (though he was penitent for it, and a Pardon was granted him by the Hand of a Prophet,) yet how ſorrowful and troubled was his afflicted Mind all his Life after; he never recovered his wonted Courage and Vivacity; he hung down his Head, and went mourning all the Day long; his Spirit was bowed-down with Grief, and he was ſcarce able to bear up under the afflicting Hand of God. He ſeems not to have been the ſame Man as formerly, nor to have kept up either the Figure or the Character in

Life which he had before done. What with the Afflictions God sent him in his Family and his Kingdom, and what with his Remorse for his Transgressions he appears to have been, as it were, unmanned, and sunk in his Spirits for the Remainder of his Life, and to have behaved and acted below his Character.

Repentance is the best thing we can retreat to, and is indeed the only Refuge left whereby to escape, in such a Case; but, in the mean while, how much better is Innocence, than the most holy & solemn Repentance?

It may, indeed, be said, that David's Sin, in that Instance, was very great for the Matter of it, as well as in its being presumptuous. True: but every presumptuous Sin, in Proportion, brings its Train of Mischiefs with it. We see it in its best Light, when we take a View of it in a Person who was sincerely penitent.

But, The most melancholy Consideration of all is, that presumptuous Sins generally harden the Conscience, and carry the Man from bad to worse, till they sink him down to a State of Stupidity here, and to utter, everlasting Perdition hereafter.

Hear the Determination of God himself, in this very Case, by his Servant Moses, to the Jews his chosen and peculiar People.

"Lest there should be among you Man or Woman, "or Family, or Tribe, whose Heart turneth away this

"Day

"Day from the Lord our God,---- Leſt there ſhould "be among you a Root that beareth Gall and Worm-"wood; And it come to paſs when he heareth the "Words of this Curſe, that he bleſs himſelf in his "Heart, ſaying, I ſhall have Peace, tho' I walk in the "Imagination of mine Heart, to add Drunkenneſs to "Thirſt. The Lord will not ſpare him, but then the "Anger of the Lord and his Jealouſy ſhall ſmoke a-"gainſt that Man, and all the Curſes written in this "Book ſhall lie upon him, and the Lord ſhall blot out "his Name from under Heaven."

From all which it is manifeſt, how highly it concerns every Man to be extremely cautious how he ventures upon Sins of this Kind, and to uſe all poſſible Endeavours to ſtand clear of wilful and deliberate, that is, preſumptuous Sins. To promote which, I ſhall now,

III. Offer ſome proper Advice and Directions how to avoid them. — And,

1ſt. The firſt Care moſt certainly is, to be inſtant in Prayers to Almighty God, to preſerve us, by his preventing Grace, from falling into them.

There is no firm Security but in God's Mercy, ſo diſpoſing the Affairs of Life, and all outward Occurrences, as not to expoſe us to Temptations beyond our Strength. In this lies our principal Security, to commit ourſelves entirely to his Protection. This is to be

done by our conſtant and fervent Prayers. God expects to be aſked and intreated by us, and has made it the Condition, and inſtrumental Means, of conveying his Grace and Bleſſing to us. But beſides this, Prayer has naturally a good Effect upon the Mind of the Supplicant: it preſerves a conſtant Awe and Reverence for God; and is keeping up a Kind of Acquaintance and Intercourſe with Heaven. It carries in it a Repugnancy and Oppoſition to all wilful Sins, and has the Force of a ſtanding Declaration or Remonſtrance againſt them. With what Heart, and Face, can a Man carry-on a daily Correſpondence and Converſe with God in Prayer, and at the ſame Time be in Confederacy with Satan, preſumptuouſly rebelling againſt the God he prays to? Rather, may we not reaſonably conclude, that, either continuing to pray would make a Man afraid and aſhamed to ſin in this high Manner; or elſe, that ſo ſinning muſt make him leave-off his Prayers: for theſe two things ſeem to ſtand at the greateſt Diſtance poſſible, and are ſcarce conſiſtent with each other. — But,

2dly, After Prayers to God to aſſiſt us, we muſt next uſe our beſt Endeavours to help ourſelves; exerting to the utmoſt thoſe Powers and Faculties which God hath given us, for his Glory, and for our own Happineſs. We ſhould conſider ſeriouſly of all the moſt

moſt proper and likely Means to be made uſe of, in Order to prevent our falling into preſumptuous Sins.

The firſt and principal is to look well to our Hearts, that they be ſet right, and kept with all Diligence.

We may obſerve, that ſinning preſumptuouſly is, as it were revolting from God, and turning off into another Intereſt. Our Hearts are not whole with God when we do it. We have let our Affections go aſtray from him, placing them ſome where elſe; upon the alluring Object of worldly Riches, Honour, or Pleaſure. This is undoubtedly the Caſe, as often as Men run into preſumptuous Sins. Wherefore the true and moſt effectual Way to prevent our doing ſo, is to look well to our Hearts, and to keep them fixed where they ought to be, upon God alone. "Set your Affections on things above, and not on things on the Earth." This is ſtriking at the Root of all preſumptuous Sins, and ſtifling them in their Birth. We ſhall not wilfully ſin againſt God, till we have learned to love the World more than we love him; till we have ſuffered Satan and his Emiſſaries to ſteal our Affections from God, and to transfer them to other Objects. Take we care, then, in the firſt Place, to govern our Affections, and to point them to their true Object.

And, in Order to do this the more effectually, our

next Care should be, to be often reflecting upon the infinite Value of heavenly things, above all earthly Enjoyments; how far Eternity is preferable to Time, and God to the World: how slight, empty, and transient all secular things are; not worthy to be compared with the Joys that shall be hereafter. — These and other the like Considerations, often repeated and treasured up in our Minds, will be of use to fix our Affection on things above, and so to prevent our falling into presumptuous Sins.

Our further Care should be to keep at a Distance from Temptations as much as possible; that so we may carry the same good Thoughts the more constantly with us, and not let them slip.

The Misfortune of Man is, that tho' he has resolved ever so well, and has armed himself with many excellent Meditations, yet new Occasions, and unexpected Occurrences, may suggest new Thoughts, and give quite another Turn to the Mind.

The safest Way, therefore, is to avoid, as much as we can, all such Occasions; and, as we pray not to be led into Temptation, so let us take-care not to run into it of our own Accord.

The last Thing I shall mention, is, to be watchful and cautious in our whole Conduct, and especially to beware of the Beginnings of things, and of the Sin that more easily besets us. It

It is the Policy of Satan to ſtrike-in with Men's complexional Vices, and to draw Men on by Degrees, – to entice them firſt into ſomething of doubtful Appearance, ſomething that borders upon Sin, and yet ſtrictly is not Sin; or has, however, an innocent Appearance in it: and to proceed Step by Step to what, at length, is undoubtedly ſinful and dangerous.

The Way to avoid this Snare, is to be wary and circumſpect; not to venture to the utmoſt Limits of what is lawful; but to keep at a due Diſtance from Sin, and how artfully diſguiſed ſoever it may come upon us, to abſtain from all Appearances of it; – to deny ourſelves ſome innocent Liberties, for Fear of their betraying us further; and not to truſt ourſelves where we ſuſpect the Combat may be unequal, and our Strength fail us.

By Theſe, and other ſuch like prudent Precautions, God's Grace preventing and aſſiſting us, we may preſerve ourſelves from preſumptuous Sins, and be undefiled and innocent from any great Offence.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXXXIX.

Sin, not chargeable upon God: with the Nature of Temptations, conſidered.

Jam. i. 13, 14. "Let no Man ſay, when he is "tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot "be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any "Man. But every Man is tempted, when he is "drawn aſide of his own Luſt, and enticed."

The Senſe of Guilt is ſo neceſſarily uneaſy upon the Mind of Man, that even the moſt hardened Sinners (*) are perpetually endeavouring to ſhift-off the Blame of their Wickedneſs from themſelves, and to throw the Fault upon whatever comes in their Way.

Sometimes the Reaſon of their Wickedneſs is, becauſe God has not made them better than they are: And "who hath reſiſted his Will?"

Sometimes it is the Devil that tempts them: and how can frail Man withſtand ſo potent and cunning a Deceiver?

Sometimes it is the ORIGINAL Corruption of their Na-

(*) Alluding to the preceding Subject.

Nature: And who can alter the Condition, to which he was born?

Sometimes it is the general Faſhion and Cuſtom of the World. And Who can be ſingular, in oppoſing ſo violent a Torrent?

The Apoſtle, in the Text, cuts-off at once both Theſe and all other Excuſes; by determining diſtinctly, that, whatever Aggravations or Extenuations of Sin, may or may not ariſe from external Circumſtances; yet Sin itſelf, the Nature and Eſſence of Sin, conſiſts entirely in the free Choice of a Man's own Will; and that his Guilt is always juſt ſo much in Proportion, as his Choice deviates from the Dictates of his Reaſon. "Every Man is tempted, when he is drawn-away of his own Luſt, and enticed."

The Word, Luſt, ſignifies in this Place every Deſire or Inclination after things unlawful in any Kind. The Deſire of unlawful Pleaſures; which is the Vice of Senſuality. The Deſire of unlawful Riches; which is the Foundation of Unrighteouſneſs, Oppreſſion, and Fraud. The Deſire of obtaining Honour by corrupt Methods; which is the Sin of Ambition. The Deſire of being Religious without true Virtue, without the ſincere Love of God and of our Neighbour; which is the Foundation of Idolatry, and of all Superſtitions. (Serm. 339) When

When by any of these Desires, a Man is drawn-away from what he knows is Right; and enticed to do, what the Reason of his Mind condemns; then, is he led into Sin. The entire Progress of which, with its Nature and Consequences, and the Inexcusableness of it; is very distinctly and very fully set-forth in That whole Period, of which the Text is a Part. "Let no Man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: For God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man; But every Man is tempted, when he is drawn-away of his own Lust, and enticed: Then, when Lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin, and Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death."

The Ground and Foundation of Temptation, are the Good things of this Present Life, the Pleasures and Enjoyments of the World. The Agreeableness of these Objects to the Imagination; the Prospect of Riches, Honour, and Pleasure; naturally, necessarily, and innocently excites Desires after them. The Continuance of these Desires, to such Degrees and in such Circumstances, wherein they cannot be gratified but by unrighteous and unlawful Means; is Temptation to Sin. The submitting of the Mind, to this Temptation; the chooling to come at the pleasing Object through unrighteous Means; the preferring, in these Circumstances, the Gratification of an unreasonable

Passion

Paſſion or Appetite, in Oppoſition to the Dictates of Reaſon and to the Laws of God; is the formal Nature, or Eſſence, of Sin. And the juſt Conſequence, of Sin thus choſen and conſented to; is Death.

And in all This, God is in no Way the Cauſe of any Man's Guilt, nor takes any Pleaſure in his Puniſhment. For all the Creatures that God has created, are originally and in their own Nature, good. But any thing may be miſapplied to unreaſonable Purpoſes. And in This Miſapplication, conſiſts the Nature of Sin.

Now whatever is in itſelf unreaſonable to be done, it is fit ſhould be puniſhed by a reaſonable Governor; and it is neceſſary, for the Support of Truth and Right, that ſuch Puniſhment ſhould be inflicted. As certain therefore as it is, that there is a God; ſo certain is it, that Sin will finally be puniſhed.

The Text, then, contains one plain and obvious Propoſition [viz] that the Nature of Sin, conſiſts in a Man's ſuffering himſelf to be drawn away, by the Enticement of ſome Appetite, Paſſion, or Intereſt, to do what he is ſenſible is not, in itſelf, fit and right; – to do what his Mind feels to be contrary to the Law of God, made known to him either by Reaſon or Revelation; contrary to Piety, or Godlineſs; contrary to Sobriety, or Temperance; contrary to Truth, Juſtice, Equity, or Charity. (Serm. 339.) And

And becauſe This Appetite, Paſſion, or Intereſt, or whatſoever it be that entices him, is the Deſire of his own Mind; without which, the Allurements of external Objects would have no Power to ſeduce him; and which Deſire or Appetite it is the proper Buſineſs of Reaſon to govern, to direct always to its proper Object, and to reſtrain continually within its due Bounds; hence it is, that Sin becomes altogether inexcuſable. "Every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed." — In the following Diſcourſe, I ſhall,

Firſt, Prove and explain the Doctrine, from the Conſideration of the intrinſick Nature and Reaſon of Things: And then,

2dly, Illuſtrate it, by comparing it with ſome remarkable Examples of ſinful Men and ſinful Actions, recorded in Scripture for our Admonition.

Firſt; In the Nature of Things, every Sin is a Deviation from ſome Rule; and ſuch a Deviation, as the Perſon is ſenſible of at the Time he acts, and knows that he ought not to have ſo acted. This it is, that makes the Action blame-worthy in its own Nature, and juſtly puniſhable by a wiſe and good Governour. The Senſe of this Blame-worthineſs, is the Conſciouſneſs or Shame of Guilt; which makes the Perſon neceſſarily to condemn himſelf, and conſequently to be

purſued

pursued continually with a just Fear or Apprehension of Punishment.

Every Being therefore, which is either so Perfect, as that it cannot possibly have any Temptation to depart from the Rule of Right; or, on the contrary, so imperfect, as not to know and understand what Right is; must be essentially incapable of Sin.

God, by Reason of the absolute Perfection of his Nature, is wholly incapable of being at all tempted with Evil. And all Creatures, inferior to Men; for a contrary Reason, they also are incapable of being tempted with Evil, because they know not what Moral Good and Evil is. But Man, being endued with rational Faculties, and knowing well the Difference between Good and Evil, and having continually the Reasons and Motives of Action, and the Obligations of Conscience and the Consequences of his Behaviour, offering themselves to his View, is still placed in such a Situation, as to be frequently tempted to depart from Reason, and to act contrary to what he knows is Right. For the good things of this Life, being naturally, necessarily, and in themselves, innocently desirable, are yet, by a numberless Variety of Circumstances in the State of things in this World, very often so constituted, as that they cannot be obtained but by unlawful Practices. Likewise evil things or Calamities of Life, which we

naturally and neceſſarily diſlike, and deſire to fly from; yet in many Caſes cannot poſſibly be avoided, but by very wicked and unrighteous Compliance.

And hence ariſes the Struggle in a Man's own Mind, between what the Scripture calls the FLESH, and the SPIRIT; between the Deſires and Inclinations of Senſe, Appetite, or Paſſion, on the one Hand; and the Dictates of Reaſon and true Religion on the other.

When, in this Conteſt, Reaſon prevails as the governing Principle; and Paſſions and Appetites are kept under due Regulation, and gratified only within the Bounds of Virtue and Integrity; then is the Man truly a religious Perſon. And if, beſides deſpiſing all unlawful Pleaſures and Profits, he moreover ſuffers at any Time actual Damage and Oppreſſion, upon Account of his adhering to what is juſt and right; he is then, in a particular Manner, a Witneſs bearing Teſtimony to the Truth, and doing Honour to the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion.

On the contrary; if Men, through Fear of any temporal Inconveniences, ſacrifice the Intereſts of Truth and Virtue; and are leſs awed by the Conſcience of Right, and by the Apprehenſions of the Judgment of God, than by the Threatnings of a vicious and corrupt World; they may then juſtly be deemed in the Number of thoſe, who are Fearful in That Senſe, wherein

St.

St. John joins together the "Fearful and Unbelieving, and Idolaters and Liars," as involved in one common Condemnation.

And if, which is ſtill much more inexcuſable than being terrified out of their Duty, they ſuffer themſelves to be withdrawn from it by the Allurements of Ambition, Pleaſure, or Profit; and be prevailed upon by theſe Temptations, to do things contrary to Reaſon, Juſtice, and Truth; this is what the Apoſtle in the Text particularly repreſents, by a Man's being "drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed;" drawn away & enticed by ſome unreaſonable Inclination or Appetite in his own Mind: which ungoverned Deſire or Appetite, "when it hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin; and Sin, when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth Death."

The State and Condition of a Perſon thus ſeduced into a ſinful Courſe, is by St. Paul emphatically ſet forth, in his Epiſtle to the Romans: "That which I do, I allow not: for, what I would, That do I not; but what I hate, That do I ... for, the Good that I would, I do not; but the Evil which I would not, That I do."

There is one Caſe indeed, wherein poſſibly This Conteſt between Reaſon and Appetite, is ſcarce at all perceived: And That is, when Men by long Habits of Vice are become ſtupid and inſenſible with Regard

to the Obligations of Morality, or, through ſome great Superſtition, have brought themſelves to think perhaps ſome of the worſt of Vices to be even a Part of Religion itſelf; "having their very Conſciences (as St. Paul expreſſes it) ſeared, as it were, with a hot Iron." In which Caſe, Men cannot indeed ſo properly be ſaid to be "enticed and tempted and drawn away into Sin;" but rather (as the Scripture elſewhere expreſſes it) to be "dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins;" Sin having already, in the Moral Senſe, "brought-forth Death," and in Part anticipated the Righteous Judgment of God.

Having thus ſhown from the intrinſick Nature and Reaſon of things, that the Eſſence or Formal Nature of Sin, conſiſts in a Man's ſuffering himſelf to be "drawn away," by the Enticement of ſome Appetite, Paſſion, or Intereſt, to do what he is ſenſible is not, in itſelf Fit and Right; and that herein lies the great Inexcuſableneſs of Sin. — I proceed,

II. To illuſtrate and confirm this Doctrine, by comparing it with ſome remarkable Examples of Sinful Men and Sinful Actions, recorded in Scripture for our Admonition.

Men at all Times, and in all Places, when they have been ſeduced by Sin, and begun to apprehend the ill Conſequences of it; have indeavoured to ſhift-off the Blame from themſelves, and to lay at leaſt Part of the

Fault

Fault upon whatever elſe they could. But the Scripture, in every Hiſtory, there recorded, has always taken Care to direct us, with ſufficient Clearneſs, to the true Source of the Evil.

Our firſt Parent EVE, when ſhe had eaten of the forbidden Fruit, immediately her Excuſe was, "The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."

And when her Huſband had done the ſame, His Apology was; "The Woman, whom thou gaveſt to be with me, ſhe gave me of the Tree, and I did eat." Yet, it is plain, neither of theſe Deceits would have had any Effect, had not "the Tree APPEARED good for Food, and pleaſant to the Eye, and a Tree to be deſired to make One wiſe."

In This therefore conſiſted their Sin: that the Deſire of pleaſing their Appetite, and gratifying their Curioſity, was of greater Weight with them than the Command of God. And in This they were too truly the Repreſentatives of Mankind: Repreſentatives, not in the Way of one Perſon's incurring Guilt for another; which is contrary to the Nature of things: but Repreſentatives, as the juſt Emblem of the Behaviour of Mankind in general. FOR every unlawful Appetite, every Appetite tending towards an unlawful Object, is the Deſire of the FORBIDDEN FRUIT; and the complying

plying with That Desire, in Opposition to the Will of God made known either by Reason or Revelation, is the Essence of Sin. "As by one Man Sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin; so Death passed upon all Men, for that all have sinned."

Balaam flattered himself, that he could not go with the Messengers of the King of Moab, without the Divine Permission; and when he did go with them, that still he could not curse Israel, without Leave from God: and if he did curse them, that yet this could not hurt them, unless God approved the Curse: and when he brought a real Curse upon them, by advising the Moabites to tempt them to Fornication, that still This was only the Consequence of their own Fault. But the true Reason of all his Procedings, was the Hope of a Reward from the King of Moab, and the Ambition of being advanced by Balak to Honour.

Saul comforted himself under his Disobedience to an express Command of God, with an imaginary Intention of "sacrificing the Choice of" his forbidden Spoils "unto the Lord his God." But the true Motive, that drew him from his Duty, was a covetous Desire of the Spoil. And his Heart was so sensible of its own Falseness, that, in the very same Breath, he insinuates that the People were faulty for preserving those Spoils; which

which he acknowledges they had, by his own Direction, preſerved for Sacrifice. (1 Sam. xv. 21, 24.)

David, in the committing of that great Crime, the Murder of Uriah; flattered himſelf with that ſhameful Apology, becauſe Uriah fell by the Hand of the Ammonites; "The Sword devoureth one as well as another." As if his being killed by the Enemy, among whom he had ordered him to be deſerted; was not the very ſame thing, as to have ſlain him immediately with his own Hand.

Ahab was willing to perſuade himſelf, that he had a Right to Ramoth-Gilead; and that God too, by his Prophets, encouraged the Undertaking. Yet, had not his Ambition and his Paſſions drawn him away, and blinded his Attention; it was eaſy for him to have perceived, that, in this whole Matter, he was acting contrary to the Will of God. For he had expreſs Warning given him, how his Prophets were deceived: and he had no other Objection againſt giving Credit to Micaiah, but only that the Truth was what he liked not to hear, and that he hated the Perſon for refuſing to flatter him in his Wickedneſs: "I hate him, ſaith he, for he doth not prophecy good concerning me, but evil."

The Caſe is the very ſame with all wicked Men, in ſome Proportion; in all Ages, and in all Kinds of unrighteous Practices. (Serm. 339) What-

Whatever Pretences they make, and whatever falſe Appearances they blind poſſibly even Themſelves withal; it is always in Reality ſome unreaſonable Appetite, Paſſion, or Intereſt, by which they are either violently hurried, or elſe perhaps inſenſibly "drawn away and enticed." — I ſhall mention one ſtanding and continual Inſtance.

In the fierceſt and moſt violent Perſecutions of one Religion upon another, it is conſtantly profeſſed, and it is probable Many of them really believe, that they are "doing God good Service," when they are oppoſing his Servants with the moſt inhuman Cruelties. Yet that the real, however perhaps ſometimes almoſt imperceptible, Spring and Motive of theſe their Proceedings is Ambition, or the Love of Power and Dominion; of This, there is always one evident and infallible Demonſtration: Which is, that they are in no Degree ſo zealous and diligent in reforming Men's Manners, nor ſo cruel in puniſhing the moſt enormous Immoralities, as they are in forcing them over into their Sect or Party. This plainly ſhows, that ſuch Kind of corrupt Religion, as well as Vices of other Denominations, are really and properly what the Apoſtle calls "Works of the Fleſh;" being founded in, and ſupported by, corrupt Paſſions, partial Affections, and evident Iniquities of Inclination; "The God of

this

this World having blinded Men's Eyes, leaſt the Light of the Truth of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, ſhould ſhine unto them."

Having thus at large ſhown both from the Reaſon of Things, and from the Practice of Men; that the Nature or Eſſence of Sin, conſiſts in a Man's ſuffering himſelf to be "drawn away, by the Enticement" of ſome Appetite, Paſſion or Intereſt, to do what he is ſenſible is not in itſelf Fit and Right, nor agreeable to the Will and Laws of God; The Inferences, I ſhall draw from this Doctrine, are,

1ſt. If "every Man is then only tempted to Sin, when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed;" The firſt evident Inference from hence, is That made by the Apoſtle himſelf; "Let no Man ſay, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." (*)

In the Reaſon of Things, and in the Nature of a Moral Government over the World, there muſt be proper Tryals of Obedience and Diſobedience; which the Goodneſs of God does not oblige him to remove; becauſe, without ſuch Tryals, God's Government of the World could not be at all a Moral Government over rational Creatures. But God never tempts any Man, with Deſign to draw him into Sin; Nor will he "ſuffer Men to be tempted above what they are able,

(*) See Vol. iii. Page 28, &c. Serm. 339.

able, but will with the Temptation alſo make a Way to eſcape, that they may be able to bear it."

2dly, No Man can with juſt Reaſon lay the Blame of his Vices, upon That Nature wherein God has created him, or upon thoſe Frailties he may be ſuppoſed to have derived from his Firſt Parents. For, Men are not accountable (as we have ſeen *) for the Appetites of Nature, nor for its Infirmities any further, than they ſuffer their own Wills to be drawn away irregularly, contrary to the Reaſon of Things, and to the Laws of God.

3dly, No Man can juſtly excuſe his own Wickedneſs, by alledging that he was tempted of the Devil. For the Devil has no Power to tempt Men any otherwiſe, than as Wicked Men tempt one another, by ſuggeſting to them the Allurements of Pleaſure and Profit. Judas was covetous and a Thief, before Satan entred into him, and prevailed with him to betray his Lord for Money. Ananias' Crime likewiſe, was not extenuated, but aggravated by his ſuffering "Satan to fill his Heart" with Deceitfulneſs and Fraud.

The "Prince of the Power of Darkneſs, is a Spirit that worketh ONLY in the Children of Diſobedience:" And the "ſtrong Deluſion God" permits him to ſend upon the World, is nothing but the "Deceivableneſs of

(*) In Sermon CCCXXXVII.

of Unrighteouſneſs, in them who love not the Truth, but have Pleaſure in Unrighteouſneſs."

They who "reſiſt the Devil, and who give not Place to him, by yielding to Sin; he will flee from them." And "whoſoever keepeth himſelf, that is, guards himſelf againſt Sin, we know that That wicked One toucheth him not." The "Prince of this World," when he came to our Lord, he found "nothing in him;" And of every ſincere Mind, it may in Proportion be ſaid in a lower Degree, that he finds in it nothing to lay hold upon. — This was the Security of Abraham. "His own Heart, was perfect with God." And the Security of every good Man, is in Proportion the ſame. God will not "ſuffer him to be tempted above what he is able," nor to be "deceived where he is not drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed." (*)

(*) See more in this Caſe, in Note (i) Vol. vi. Page 456, &c.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXL.

On enticing others to Sin.

2 Tim. iii. 13. "Evil Men and Seducers ſhall wax "worſe and worſe; deceiving, and being deceived."

Theſe are prophetic Words of the Apoſtle, deſcribing the perilous Times which ſhall come in the laſt Days. He gives us a long Catalogue of many grievous and horrid Crimes which ſhall then come upon Men: "For Men (ſays he) ſhall be Lovers of their own-ſelves, covetous, Boaſters, proud, Blaſphemers, diſobedient to Parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural Affection, Truce-Breakers, falſe Acculers, incontinent, fierce, Deſpiſers of thoſe that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, Lovers of Pleaſure more than Lovers of God; having a Form of Godlineſs but denying the Power thereof: from ſuch turn away." And, (in the Text,) "Evil Men and Seducers ſhall wax worſe and worſe; deceiving, and being deceived."

Were they only ſome ſlight and trivial Indiſcretions, to which the Example or Perſuaſions of "Evil Men and Seducers" expoſed us, it might perhaps not much

concern

concern our Religion, or affect any important Part of our Happiness, whether we regarded them or not.

But alas! the Interest endangered is no less than our Title to Heaven, and the Favour of our Creator: the Actions to which "evil Men and Seducers" solicit our Compliance, are those very Sins which forfeit our eternal Expectations, and treasure up Wrath and Vengeance against us from the Justice of God.

The far greater Part of the Examples that occur to us, are so many Encouragements to Vice and Disobedience. "The whole World lieth in Wickedness."

In the Days of the Apostle, when all who professed themselves Disciples of Christ were Converts of Conscience, this severe Censure could have no Place: and, even in our Days, the Purity of our Religion, the Excellency of its Laws, and the Weight of its Sanctions, might indeed encourage us to hope better things: But alas! when we see Christianity taken-up by many, only as the fashionable Religion of their Country, and for the Sake of those Civil Encouragements which attend its Profession, acting, the same Time, contrary to all the Dictates of its holy Injunction; and not only so, but endeavour to draw-in others also, ("evil Men and Seducers, deceiving, and being deceived,") the Complaint here is too applicable to excuse them any longer from the Extent of it. (Serm. 340.) The

The Enemy of our Happineſs has his Servants and Votaries, even among thoſe who are called by the Name of the Son of God. He is ſtyled in Scripture, "the Prince of this World;" and the Conduct of too great a Number will always be influenced by his Authority, and obey his Direction. "They are all gone out of the Way, they are altogether become abominable, there is none that doeth good; no not one."

Let us not flatter ourſelves that our Innocence is without Danger of Contagion, from a World where we behold every Inſtance of Lewdneſs and Intemperance, Profaneneſs and Irreligion, not only committed, but owned, defended, and gloried in. The World indeed was never without Examples of Vice and Immorality; wicked Men there always were, and always will be. But the public State of Religion is ſomewhat leſs in Danger of Corruption, while the Sinner acknowledges the Obligations of his Duty, is aſhamed of his Irregularities, profeſſes a Reverence for the Laws of God, and promiſes ſtill to reform, and live agreeably to them. He offends indeed, but it is with a Modeſty like the Son in the Goſpel, who owned the Authority of the Command, and promiſed his Father to go, though he went not.

But the Caſe is far otherwiſe, and the Danger of the Example much greater, when an open Party is formed againſt

againſt Religion; when Vice has the public Encouragement of Applauſe, and Profaneneſs becomes eſtabliſhed as a Faſhion; when Men ſhall no longer affect to hide and conceal their Crimes, but make the moſt daring Impieties a Motive of their Vanity; when the Principles of Obedience, and the Authority that requires it, are queſtioned, and the very Articles of our Faith diſputed and ridiculed; when Atheiſm, Deiſm, and Hereſy, are confeſſed, applauded, and ſupported; when the Altar, the Service, and Miniſters of God, are treated with Scorn, and the whole Œconomy of the Goſpel expoſed to Contempt as Fable and Impoſture: This is not Diſobedience, but Rebellion; It is diſclaiming the Sovereignty of Chriſt, and renouncing all Allegiance to his Authority, and declaring, in Terms full and expreſſive, "We will not have this Man to rule over us."

And yet Theſe are the Crimes, this the Pattern which "Evil Men and Seducers, (deceiving, and being deceived,) would propoſe to our Imitation: Theſe they recommend as Arguments of more refined Senſe, and a ſuperior Underſtanding: to Theſe we are ſolicited by numerous Examples in every Rank and Order of Men; by the Authority of the Great, and the Intimacies of our Equals; by the Arguments of the Subtle, and the Railleries of the Profane; by the Reproaches

of our Enemies, and the Perſuaſion of Friends, "waxing worſe and worſe:" while Chriſtian Faith, Piety, and Devotion, are traduced and ridiculed as moroſe, unconverſible Qualities, the Effect of Pride or Folly, of Knavery or Superſtition.

And can the Miniſters of the Goſpel too frequently remind Men of ſo imminent a Danger, or too earneſtly diſcourage a Conformity to ſo corrupt and diſſolute Example? For be we aſſured, it is not a Trifle that we hazard, but the greateſt Intereſt of our Nature, the eternal Salvation of our Souls, the End for which we were born, and the Reaſon for which we were ſent into the World.

The Methods which Evil Men and Seducers take to entice and deceive others, (themſelves being deceived,) are, either,

Firſt, By their wicked Counſel, Advice, or Command. — Or,

Secondly, By their more pernicious Practice and Example.

I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeperately, and give ſome Advice and Direction under each. — And Firſt,

The Methods by which Evil Men and Seducers operate by their Advice, are too various and compli-

cated,

cated to admit here of a Diſcuſſion; and withal, at the firſt Sight, muſt be ſo exploded, as to ſtand ſelf-detected. — For,

The great Lines of our Duty, the natural Knowledge of moral Good and Evil, are ſo evident to every Man, that, unleſs we are greatly eſtranged, by a corrupt Practice, from the primitive State of our Nature, we cannot but diſcern it at its firſt Approach towards us; for, "the Knowledge of Wickedneſs is not Wiſdom, neither at any Time the Counſel of Sinners Prudence."

Add to this Law of our Nature, the written Word of God. (*)

Whatever is commanded or prohibited in Scripture, is certainly to be practiſed or avoided: A Compliance to others in things directly contrary to it, whatever may be pretended, can never be juſtifiable; (‡) the which, therefore we ſhould make continually our Study, to aſſiſt us in the Improvement of our Knowledge of natural things, in Order more perfectly to diſcover and guard

(*) The Scriptures are ſufficient to diſſolve all Doubts in Religion; and not to believe them, is to periſh by them. See Note (A) Vol. I. Page 306.

(‡) Retain your own Virtues, and by Imitation naturalize thoſe of Others; but let none be Copies to you, longer than they agree with the Original: ſtudy to gain Reſpect, not by *little* Obſervances, but by a conſtant fair Carriage. Serm. CCCXL.

guard againſt all Emiſſaries to Evil whatever, who ſhall be ſo ungenerous as to attempt to ſeduce us from our Duty, and "from the Hope that is in us."—

Whenever therefore we are tempted by Sinners to a Compliance with them in any thing that is evil, let us have Regard, in the firſt Place, to the written Word of God; "How readeſt thou?" and ſo act conformably to the given Rule before us. (*)

This was the wiſe Method our Bleſſed Saviour took to ſubdue the evil Temptations of Satan, "IT IS WRITTEN." Thus, by this "Sword of the Spirit,—the Word of God," he ſubdued all the fiery Darts of the Devil.

Let the Study of the ſacred Scriptures, therefore, be our Care and Meditation, our daily Practice and principal Concern; and let us embrace the Doctrines contained in them, as the Oracles of Heaven, and the Dictates of That Spirit which cannot lie: and let them be the governing Rule and Guide of our Life, at all Times, and in all things. (‡) But,

If the Scripture be ſilent, and affords no Light to the doubting Mind; Then, to determine our Practice, as far as Reaſon can direct us, we are to have a Regard to the Decency, to the Lovelineſs, and Expediency of our

(*) *Nubem Mentis Splendor ſacrarum Literarum expellit.*

(‡) *Verbum divinum Regula Vitæ eſt. Gubernaculum Vitæ Lex Dei eſt.* All that God commands is good, and all that He forbids is evil.

our Actions. This muſt undoubtedly paſs for the ſafeſt and moſt eligible Rule of Behaviour. (*) But,

If the Conſcience ſhould ſtill ſcruple, the ſureſt Way then, is, not to do it; and afterwards to be well-inſtructed in the Matter: However, at no Time acting againſt our Conſcience, in which we always offend: for we are never allowed to do what we believe is evil, even tho' we ſhould be miſtaken in ſuch a Belief. (†)

As to the Perſons adviſing or commanding to Sin, the Degree of their Guilt ariſes in Proportion to any ſuperior Advantages they enjoy over the Perſon, to whom the Advice is given.

Thoſe, for Inſtance, who have the Reputation of greater Knowledge or Wiſdom, or who have more immediately the Direction of other Men's Conſciences, if they give them Advice which leads them into Sin, or into any Breach of their Duty, are in ſo much higher a Degree, and more ſeverely anſwerable for it. For,

(*) The Voice of God to Man, is, in the Reaſon of Man. "The Word is nigh thee, in thy Heart, and in thy Mind." The Calls and Commands of pure uncorrupted Nature are the Calls and Commands of God. — Where Reaſon ſpeaks, it is the Voice of God. — *Ratio immortalis eſt; ut a Cœlo deſcendit, ſic ad Superos ducit.* *Of Dev. and Deve.*

(†) *Bene præcipiunt qui vetant quicquid agens quod dubites, æquum ſit an iniquum; Æquitas enim lucet ipſa per ſe: Dubitatio Cogitationem ſignificat Injuriæ.* See Page 22—and Rom. xiv. 23.

For, It is natural for thoſe who are ignorant, to conclude, that their Superiors, who are highly eſteemed for their Wiſdom and Knowledge, will not (as they are ſuppoſed to know things better) adviſe them to any thing but what is lawful and juſt. — But,

The higheſt Aggravation is when we command others upon any thing that is ſinful, or make them the Inſtruments of executing our criminal Projects; wherein, probably, they may be, in a great Meaſure, paſſive. But whether they be or no, it is the ſame thing before God, to ſin againſt him in Perſon, or by Proxy; only we muſt obſerve, that we are ſo much the more culpable in any unlawful Command, as it carries a greater Weight and Appearance of Authority along with it.

Thus David, by directing the Means of taking off the Life of Uriah, and commanding him to be executed, is expreſsly charged by Nathan with his Death, and in Terms which import it was his own proper and perſonal Act. "Thou (ſays the Prophet to him) art the Man, – Thou haſt killed Uriah the Hittite, and haſt ſlain him with the Sword of the Children of Ammon."

As to Joab, who had the Charge of ſeeing the Orders of his Prince put in Execution, tho he did not act upon any private Motives of Envy or Revenge, or whatever he might plead (as Captain of the Hoſt) he had

had a Right to command: yet, as he knew the particular Intention of David, and that the Poſt he commanded Uriah to, was not deſigned for his Honour, or the Service of his Prince, but for his Deſtruction; in this, no Doubt, Joab ſinned: tho' there is great Reaſon to believe, that David, upon many Accounts, and particularly by the Abuſe of his ſuperior Authority, "had the GREATER Sin:" as every Perſon proportionably has, who makes-uſe of his Power or ſuperior Station over others, to engage them to any criminal Deſigns, which they would not otherwiſe have been concerned in. (*) But,

Secondly, Another, and indeed the moſt prevalent and dangerous Method of enticing others to Sin, is, by Example, which is a ſhorter Way of Teaching, & operates more powerfully and inſenſibly, than Precept and Inſtruction: which, it is confeſſed, forms abſtract Ideas of Vice in the Mind; but, in Example, Wickedneſs is

(*) He that countenances, encourages, or abets Miſchief, does it. And he that hinders not a Miſchief when it is in his Power, is himſelf guilty of it. The Fault which we ſuffer in our Friend, by ſo doing, we make it our own: by conniving at it, we become guilty of it ourſelves. *Qui tacet, conſentire videtur. Qui poteſt emendare, et negligit, Participem proculdubiò ſe conſtituit: Qui alterius Bonum juvat, ſuum facit. Qui non vetat peccare, cùm poſſit, jubet: Amici Vitia ſi ſevas, facias tua. Qui non corrigit reſecanda, committit; et facientis Culpam habet, qui quod poteſt corrigere, negligit emendare.*

Serm. CCCXL.

is made visible in all its Circumstances to the Eye; the Rule of Men's Lives being, for the most Part, not what they are taught, or think themselves obliged to, but what they see in the general Practice of others. (*)

The evil Example of a wicked Man is more forcible to entice others into the same wicked Practices, than the best Instructions are to dissuade them from it.

Examples are in our View almost every Day; and when Men, by these, find the Way to Wickedness, by Custom and Practice made easy and delightful to walk in — when they see it hath been frequented by others before them; how easily are they led to "follow the Multitude to do Evil." — And,

More especially so, when the Vicious are those of the higher Rank.

Though Vice be, of itself, of a spreading & infectious Nature, yet, it becomes more fatally so, when it hath

(*) "Example draws where Precept fails."

Nothing is of so infectious and pestilent a Nature, as Example. No Man does an exceeding good, or very ill thing, but it produces others of the same Kind: we imitate the Good out of Emulation, and the Bad out of natural Corruption. — Certain Actions which appear abominable to us in our Solitude, look with a quite different Aspect when we see them commonly done.

Majoris est Culpæ, manifestè, quàm occultè peccare: duplicitèr enim reus est, qui aperte delinquit, quia agit et docet: ergò, non modò pro sui ipsius, sed aliorum Culpâ, Crimen habet; et Damnis reserciendis est obnoxius. Actions speak louder than Words. *Hæc sonant, Illa resonant.*

hath great Examples to plead, to encourage and patronize it; for, this adds a Kind of Credit and Reputation to it, and makes it paſs for current among thoſe, who frequently know no better, and who are wont to quote the Actions of their Superiors for the Excuſe and Juſtification of their own obſequious ſinful Compliance. It was this which made the wiſe Son of Sirach to deliver this wholeſome Maxim. "Accept no Perſon againſt thy Soul, and let not the Reverence of any Man cauſe thee to fall."

In the former Part of our Lives, the Rules and Meaſures of our Practice are almoſt wholly taken from the Conduct of ſuch Perſons as fall within our Obſervation. We have indeed Precepts of Duty given us by our Inſtructors; but theſe we imagine are beſt explained by the Actions of thoſe who have learned them before us. We are apt to argue that theſe Men have had longer Opportunities of Information, and are equally concerned in the Conſequences of Obedience with ourſelves; and if their Duty be conſiſtent with the Liberties we obſerve in their Practice, it is a fooliſh Superſtition in us to refuſe ourſelves the ſame Indulgences. And the ſame Authority that the Actions of a Man have with us in our Childhood, the ſame in every Period of Life has the Practice of all, whom we regard as our Superiors in Knowledge, Figure, or Sta-

tion, in the World. We perſuade ourſelves they have ſome ſecret Reaſons for what we ſee them do, which however, through Want of their Information and Capacity, may be unknown to us; yet whatever they are, they muſt be equally concluſive for us as they are for them.

Thus we implicitly follow in the Track in which they lead us, and comfort ourſelves with this poor Reflection, that we ſhall fare as well as thoſe that go before us: and what the Example of our Equals wants of Authority, is abundantly ſupplied in the Inſinuations of Friendſhip, and the repeated Influences of a conſtant Converſation. We are naturally inclined to think favourably of thoſe we love, and our Affection to the Perſon inſenſibly engages us to approve his Actions; and then what we approve in our Friend, we can hardly be induced to think criminal in ourſelves.

And if, beſides our Proneneſs to imitate thoſe we love and converſe with, we obſerve the Addreſs and Aſſiduity they will uſe to corrupt us; that it is a natural Effect of the Pride of Man to labour to infuſe his Sentiments, and recommend his Practice to others; that This is a Compliment our Superiors will demand to their Authority, and our Equals to their Friendſhip; we have ſtill a further Argument to convince us of the Danger of this Temptation. It

It is, indeed, ſcarce poſſible for a good-natured Man to refuſe a Compliance with the Solicitations of his Company, to ſtand out againſt the Raillery of his Familiars, and the continual Reproaches of Affectation and Singularity. We are fond of pleaſing and endearing ourſelves to thoſe we eſteem; and ſince nothing more affectionately recommends one Man to another, than a Similitude of Manners and Diſpoſition, we are irreſiſtibly led into the ſame Inclinations and Averſions with them.

In general, we cannot but obſerve, and in too many Inſtances lament, the Power of Faſhion and popular Cuſtom; with what Tyranny it governs the Sentiments and Actions of Men; makes That reputable in one Age, which was a Vice in another; and reverſes even the Diſtinctions of Good and Evil: like brute Beaſts we travel with the Herd, and are never ſo ſolicitous for the Rightneſs of the Way, as for the Number or Figure of our Company.

With how juſt a Concern therefore do we caution you againſt an Enemy, ſo apt to prevail upon your Weakneſs? A Temptation to which every Period of our Age, every State and Condition of our Life is expoſed: a Temptation of ſtill the greater Danger, becauſe it deceives us under the falſe Similitude of Virtue, is covered with the ſpecious Names of Good-

Nature and Good-manners; recommends itſelf with all the Charms of Friendſhip, and is encouraged by the Eſteem and Applauſe of all about us.

Could an Expedient, therefore, be found-out to keep Profaneneſs and Irreligion from creeping into chief Families, we might reaſonably expect to ſee Chriſtianity recover its Credit and Footing in the World, and the Profeſſors of it wonderfully reformed, both in their Principles and Practices. — For,

The lower People (who are generally fond of imitating their Superiors) would ſoon come to have a good Opinion of Virtue, if it was but duly recommended to them by the ſolid Practice of thoſe above them.

At leaſt, they would be forced to conceal thoſe Sins which either their Intereſts or their Luſts would not give them Leave to part with. — Whereas,

The Riches, the Honour, and Dignity of a vicious Man take-away from the formidable Magnitude of his Crime, and make his Words and Actions to have the Authority and Force of a Recommendation; which were they only ſeen in Perſons of lower Rank, would be thought, as they really are, ungenerous and contemptible, unreaſonable and dangerous. — Indeed,

By how much the more great and wiſe, wicked and vicious Men are, by ſo much the more Miſchief they do, as their Wiſdom and Examples are even as Oracles

to their Inferiors; (*) for, hereby it may not be unfairly conjectured, that Wiſdom and Righteouſneſs have been "weighed by them, and found wanting in the Balance." — And!

What Conſideration is there more powerful and weighty, or which ſhould have a greater Influence on the Morals and Conduct of the Rich, than this; [viz.] that they not only hereby aſſure to themſelves eternal Happineſs, or interminable Miſery; but that others alſo, "beholding their Works, are either led to glorify their Father which is in Heaven," or conſign themſelves, together with the Patterns of their Vices, through Diſobedience, to endleſs and unſpeakable Torments. (‡)

Youth,

(*) The Prepoſſeſſions of the Vulgar for Men in Power and Authority are ſo blind, and they are generally ſo admired in every thing they do, that if they could but bethink themſelves of being good, the Multitude would, in a Manner, idolize them. But when Excellence concurs with Birth and Fortune, it paſſes for a Prodigy.

The ſmalleſt Defect or Fault in a diſtinguiſhed and accompliſhed Perſon, obſcures the whole Orb of his Virtues. He cannot tranſgreſs, but (like the Eclipſe of the Sun,) every One takes notice of him. *Omne Animi Vitium, tanto conſpectius in ſe Crimen habet; quanto major, qui peccat, habetur.*

See Knox's Eſſays, No. 161. On the peculiar Baſeneſs of Vice in Nobility. No. 146, On the Weight and Efficacy which Morality may derive from the Influence and Example of thoſe who are called the Great. And alſo the laſt Paragraph of No. 147. The Whole indeed of this, is worthy of the moſt attentive Conſideration.

(‡) See Page 11, 12.

Youth, in particular, when entering into Life, ſhould be warned earneſtly againſt the faſhionable Examples of the Rich and Great Vulgar, who often militate againſt all that is decent, regular, virtuous and learned. Unleſs we are taught in our Youth to be on our Guard againſt the deſtructive Influence, we ſhall certainly incur imminent Danger of corrupting our Principles and Practice, by a blind and bigoted Imitation.

Experience daily evinces, that without this Precaution, all the Advantages of a virtuous and learned Education, all the Documents of Paternal Care, all prudential, moral and religious Reſtraints, may be totally fruſtrated.—The Rich and Great may be conſidered as Beacons on a Promontary; and, if they hang out deceitful Lights, they who will allow no other Signal to direct them, (and the Number of theſe is infinite) will probably be miſguided in the Voige of their Lives, till they are daſhed on Rocks, or ſunk in Whirl-pools.

Little do Men conſider when they are engaging in a ſinful Courſe, what a Fund of Wrath "they are treaſuring up to themſelves againſt the Day of Wrath; and that the Sinner, in his Wickedneſs, is preparing Fuel to "heat the Furnace one ſeven Times hotter" for his Deſtruction; and, in the midſt of his Dreams and Shadows of Pleaſure, is growing up (I tremble to relate it) to a miſerable Eternity! If,

If, therefore, we have any Regard for ourſelves, or Concern for our Fellow-creatures, let us not deſtroy both, by our Wickedneſs, "for whom Chriſt died."

Indeed, So ſtrict are the Rules of our moſt holy Religion, in Reference to our external Behaviour, that we are not permitted the moſt innocent Freedoms, when we thereby wound the Conſciences of our weak Brethren, or make them offend. But,

Where, by a Conduct, really criminal, or by allowing ourſelves in any unlawful Practice, ſeducing Men by our Advice or Example, we become inſtrumental in deſtroying the Souls of others, This muſt neceſſarily involve us deep in the Guilt of ſuch Perſons, and inflame the Account we ſtand charged with, on their Score, to a greater Height. For hereby we become guilty, not only of our own Sins, but of others' alſo; for He that countenances, encourages, and abets Miſchief, does it; and, conſequently, will be chargeable for it.

Add to this, the Deformity of the Practice, together with the Injuſtice and Uncharitableneſs of it to our Fellow-creatures.

We hereby take the Buſineſs of the Evil One out of his Hands, and ſet forward the ſame pernicious Deſigns againſt God and Religion, and that too, much more effectually. — For, (Serm. 340) It

It is not to be doubted, but that the moſt Wicked and Profligate would tremble, would ſtart back and fly from the moſt alluring Temptations, ſhould Satan appear plainly to entice them to Sin; but, the Poiſon is ſoon conveyed into the Soul by a Man of like Paſſions with ourſelves; and ſometimes deceive, perhaps, under the Appearance of Friendſhip and Virtue. (*)

They can ſooth our Luſts and encourage our Vices, and ſo get within us unawares, and before we ſuſpect them; and therefore, do the greater Miſchief.

Whoever injures another only in his temporal Eſtate, may make Reparation; but, "it coſts more to redeem our Souls, ſo they muſt let That alone forever." Here no Amends can be made to the greateſt of all Loſſes, the moſt laſting of all Injuries.

Chriſt died to ſave Sinners; whereas, theſe live (O Height of Injuſtice, without Compaſſion!) to make Sinners "ſeven Times more ſo." Now,

If the Devil ought to be juſtly abhorred by us, as the great and implacable Enemy of Mankind, then, for the ſame Reaſon alſo, will all thoſe, who have any Regard to their preſent or future Intereſts, ſhun and abhor every Factor and Inſtrument to Evil.

It is no inferior Degree of Impiety for a Man to live in an habitual, conſtant, and wilful Diſobedience

(*) *Ut qui palàm eſt Adverſarius, facilius cavatur, quàm* to *Hoſtis occultus: ità, minùs ladunt Vitia aperta, quàm ſimulata Virtutes.*

to the holy and righteous Commands of God. But, Not content to do these things ourselves, without endeavouring to seduce others to do the same, is a Crime too vast for Expression, too vile for Excuse, and so universally destructive of all Goodness, that, without the "Spirit of Prophecy," we may easily tell what the End of these things will be; or, if we cannot, Solomon will instruct us: "Tho Hand join in Hand," even the united and confederate Malice of wicked Men "shall not go unpunished;" (i.e) shall be utterly destroyed in that great Day when the Almighty shall consign over his Enemies to Miseries, which no Tongue is now able to express, and no Patience will then be able to endure.

The Punishment hereof will be aggravated in This, that both God, and Sinners their seduced Co-agents, will multiply their Sufferings on this Account.

This probably was the Reason, (for we cannot well suppose Charity in Hell,) why Dives, in Torments, was so urgent with our Father Abraham to send Lazarus to his Brethren, in Order to warn them, "lest they should come into his Place and State of Torments," and there aggravate his Misery by their severe Upbraiding for the evil Advice and Example he had but too probably given them in their evil Courses. And!

Will it not make the Ears of the hardest Seducer to tingle, when he shall lift up his Eyes, with Dives, being

in Torment, and ſhall hear thoſe whom he hath ſeduced, then ſeverely to rebuke him: when Curſing and Woe, Wrath and Deſpair, ſhall not depart from him?

If therefore we would not greatly aggravate our Guilt, and conſequently our future Danger and Damnation, we ſhould be particularly careful of ourſelves in this Point, that "if we ſin, to ſin alone, and not with another;" that we may not at the laſt be borne-down with the double aggravated Load of Guilt upon us.

It will be found a Matter hard enough to anſwer for our own Sins, and to bear the Guilt and Burden of our own Tranſgreſſions, without having any thing to anſwer for the Sins of others: — But,

When all the Wickedneſs which others ſhall have committed, by our Encouragement and Example, is to be anſwered for by us, we ſhall find by woeful Experience, that we might have employed ourſelves and our Time much better; and ſhall be no leſs confounded with the Shame, than at the Guilt of not having done ſo.

Let us, then, in all things live up to the Rules of Prudence and Diſcretion; ſo, as not to endanger ourſelves, nor be an Occaſion of Sin to our weak "Brother, for whom Chriſt died:" — Above all things, — We ſhould have a particular Regard to thoſe Temptations, to which we are moſt expoſed, and do thereby expoſe others, — ſtrive againſt them, and ſo prevent our, or

their

their falling into any dangerous Temptation; This would be to make ſuch a diſcreet and prudent Uſe of our Chriſtian Liberty, as would render ourſelves eaſy, and of Benefit both to ourſelves and others: – This would be to ſhine as Lights in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe Generation: – This would keep us pure from the Blood of all Men; and ſave both ourſelves, and them that are either committed to us, or have any Dealings or Converſe with us.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLI.

Folly and Danger of complying with the Enticements of Sinners.

Prov. i. 10. "My Son, If Sinners entice thee, "conſent thou not."

"Have no Fellowſhip with the unfruitful Works of Darkneſs, but rather reprove them."—"Number not thyſelf among the Multitude of Sinners, but remember that Wrath will not tarry long."—"Walk not thou in the Way with them: refrain thy Foot from their Paths, for their Feet run to Evil."

Though in the State of Danger wherein we are placed, God hath made us Watchmen over One another, for our mutual Good; yet there are Chriſtians, or ſuch as profeſs themſelves ſo, who, (inſtead of uſing their beſt Endeavours to convert Sinners from the Error of their Ways,) not content to do wickedly themſelves, ("evil Men and Seducers, waxing worſe and worſe; deceiving, and being deceived," *) enter into a ſinful Commerce with others, or more treacherouſly ſe-

(*) The preceding Subject.

duce

duce them; thereby going-over (as it were) to the oppoſite Intereſts of the Powers of Darkneſs, and ſerve the Deſigns of that Wicked One, "who ſtill works in the Children of Diſobedience," whereby even the moſt Diligent and Circumſpect may be ſurprized and deceived: It is, therefore, the higheſt Wiſdom to fortify our Minds with all ſuch Conſiderations as may ſecure us in our Duty, and preſerve us from being drawn away, either by the wicked Counſels, or more pernicious Examples of theſe Advocates for Wickedneſs, who "lie in wait to deceive: Which cannot be better done, than by conſidering theſe Words of Solomon to this Purpoſe: "My Son, if Sinners entice thee, conſent thou not."

In all the Actions of human Life, Men have generally ſo great a Regard to the Circumſtances, the End, and Conſequences of them, that, even in things of an indifferent Nature, they will not eaſily recede from the ancient Cuſtoms and Practices, which they have been long uſed to, without being firſt convinced, that the Change or Alteration will turn to their greater Advantage. (*) — And,

It will ſeem more unreaſonable to do this in the Actions of the Moral Life, the Reaſons whereof are eter-

(*) "He that is truly wiſe, will be wiſe for himſelf." Serm. CCCXLI.

eternally the ſame and binding; and whoſe Goodneſs, without a divine Command, is an indiſpenſible Obligation. — And,

Though the Graces and Perfections which adorn human Nature are little taken-Notice-of by the unthinking Part of Mankind, who are altogether intent upon the Profits and Pleaſures of this World, yet, we never heard of any ſo entirely blinded, as, on the one Hand, to condemn Prudence, Juſtice, Charity and Temperance, as being either ridiculous in their Nature, or odious in their Practice; or, of any, on the other, who heartily believed any real Eſteem and Veneration to be due to a vicious and profligate Courſe of Life. This fully ſhews the Unreaſonableneſs of conſenting to thoſe who would entice us to Sin. — For,

If, in the Proſecution of human Affairs, it would be counted an Abſurdity to conſult a Fool about the Rules of a wiſe and prudent Management; or to enquire of a Mad-man what is ſound Judgment and Underſtanding; it is no leſs a Soleciſm in ſpiritual Matters to go to ſuch as are wholly immerſed in Senſuality, to learn what is Religion, and to the Worldly-minded, to be inſtructed in the things of the Spirit, or to be taught the deep things of God.

To comply, therefore, with Sinners in any thing that is contrary to the Laws of God, and the known Rea-

ſon

ſon of things, let them plead what they will for it, is both unmanly and ſhameful.

But perhaps, it may be, you are not led to the groſſer Act, thro the Advice or Command, or even by the Example of Sinners, knowing that the Commiſſion itſelf cannot be pleaded for. — But!

Do you not conſent, in your Minds, to it? nor reflect upon it, after it is committed, with Complacency and Delight? If ſo,

Nothing is more evident, than that we may, to all Intents and Purpoſes, be guilty of Sin, without actually committing it. "The Thought of Fooliſhneſs (ſays Solomon) is Sin;" eſpecially ſuch a Thought as implies a full and free Conſent of the Will to Sin, tho we may perhaps, be under Circumſtances of Reſtraint from committing it: — Eſpecially when we take Complacency in any ſinful Action after it is committed, tho we were in no Way concerned in it.

As to the Quality of the Crime, it is not very material, whether we become Partakers of it by a PRIOR, or AFTER Conſent; only there ſeems to be this Difference in the Caſe, [viz] that to approve of any ſinful Action, when perpetrated by another, or to diſcover by any Motion of the Will, that in his Caſe we would have done the ſame, argues a greater Corruption of Heart, and that Sin has got a more abſolute Dominion over

us; becauſe we are not under thoſe preſent, and perhaps preſſing Circumſtances of Temptation which he was under, and which Charity will ſuppoſe him to have been under, before he was overcome. — In a Word,

To ſhew an After-complacency in the Sins of other Men, is to love Sin out of pure Inclination; upon which Reaſon, probably, it was, that the Apoſtle concluded his Catalogue of the moſt horrid Sins human Nature can be ſuppoſed capable of falling into, in its moſt corrupt State, with That of "taking Pleaſure in the Sins of others." (*)

As to the Motives inducing us, too frequently, into a criminal Compliance with others, they are,

1ſt. Falſe Shame. — 2dly, Falſe Compliſance. 3dly, Dependance. And laſtly, A Senſe of Gratitude. — And firſt,

It is but a poor Excuſe, which but too many are apt to urge in their Defence, that they complied with the evil Cuſtoms of the World, and Enticements of others, thro' Fear of Ridicule, and leſt they ſhould be thought ſingular in their Conduct. (‡) But,

What have we to do with thoſe, whoſe Ridicule we cannot bear, nor eſcape, without forfeiting our Innocence? — The Cenſures of thoſe who are deſpiſed by

(*) Rom. i. 32.

(‡) See Knox's Eſſays, No. 41. On the ill Effects of Ridicule. And No. 154 of the Spectator.

by the Wiſe and Honeſt, are not to be regarded. We ſhould rather eſteem it a Matter of Glory, than of Bluſhing, when we are derided by Rakes and Proſligates, on Account of our Virtues. — Not that we ſhould make no Account of their Scorn; no: we ought to prize it, as the beſt Teſtimony ſuch Perſons are capable of bearing to our Characters and Merit.

If by mean and ſinful Compliances we ſeek to conciliate the Favour of, and recommend ourſelves to, the Vile and Licentious, theſe very Perſons will deſpiſe us in the End; and we are ſure to be condemned by all the worthy Part of Mankind. Whereas, if we ſteadily perſevere in the Courſe of Virtue, the very Fools themſelves, who accounted our Life Madneſs, and our End to be without Honour, who now deride, will, (being amazed at the Strangeneſs of our Salvation, ſo much beyond all they looked for,) ſoon begin to reverence our Characters: Or, The Honour and Reſpect we ſhall infallibly gain from the Wiſe and Good, will make us rich Amends for all the Scorn and Contempt they can pour upon us. But,

2dly, We are frequently betrayed into a criminal Compliance with the Humours and Deſigns of other Men, out of a falſe Complaiſance. — The Deſire to be thought agreeable to all, is the Deſire of all, and the univerſal Idol of Mankind. — Now, The

The Way to procure Favour and Eſteem of thoſe with whom we converſe, is to render ourſelves eaſy and agreeable to them. — And,

That an opulent Fortune has not of itſelf, a Power to do this is evident; for rich Men often put on too haughty and aſſuming an Air: — nor, again, is it Wit; for That many Times proves ſatyrical and offenſive: neither is it Quality; which may degenerate, and want thoſe Qualifications which are proper to ſupport and adorn it: — nor, laſtly, is it Piety; for, beſides, that good Men are not always Perſons of the niceſt Addreſs, it is impoſſible for them, on every Occaſion, to obſerve the ſtrict Rules of Piety, without appearing ſingular and affected. For, — To be thought of an agreeable and oblidging Temper, a Man muſt not only be content, in the Society of vicious Perſons, to hear a great many vain and fooliſh Things ſaid, but muſt ſeem to applaud and approve them.

But certainly, We ought rather to avoid, if poſſible, ſuch Converſation, than flatter it. In this Reſpect, and upon all other Occaſions, wherein, out of an Inclination to oblige, we may more eaſily be induced to criminal Compliances, the Apoſtle's Argument is unanſwerable, "If I yet ſtudy to pleaſe Men, more than God, then am I not the Servant of Chriſt."

And

And yet, we do not deny that Compliſance, or an Endeavour to pleaſe, is a Virtue. There is nothing more agreeable to the Genius and Deſign of Chriſtianity, than for Chriſtians to render themſelves amiable and agreeable to one another. But, what then! – Shall we contribute to flatter thoſe ſinful Paſſions in our Friends, which will hurry them headlong to Deſtruction? Or, ſhall we countenance them in ſuch Diſorders, which, when they ſhall hereafter conſider and reflect upon, they will be aſhamed and confounded at? and perhaps, in the Bitterneſs of their Souls, curſe ſuch Friends as ſaw, and yet ſuffered Sin upon them: and, to encourage them, became guilty with them.

We have the Example of a great Apoſtle, who "became all things to all Men," – but it was in things, in their own Nature, arbitrary and indifferent, "that by any Means he might ſave ſome:" or rather, indeed, "that he might gain the more." And herein, he acted agreeably to the Spirit of our holy Religion; which "is pure, peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Works." – A Spirit which ſweetens the Nature and corrects the Tempers of Men, and does not diſcover itſelf in a perverſe Oppoſition to the innocent Humours of thoſe with whom we have to do; but rather removes all Occaſions of Offence, by a generous and ready Complyance with them.

And yet, which of the Apoſtles diſcovered a greater Zeal, or "laboured more abundantly" in propogating the Truths of it? – which of them declaimed with greater Warmth, or with greater Aſperity of Expreſſion againſt Vice, or exerciſed a more ſtrict and ſevere Diſcipline, than this very Apoſtle?

Theſe things are very reconcileable, and the Example he has ſet us, imitable. Chriſtianity does not interfere with any reaſonable Duty of civil Life, but improves and enobles it. — But,

3dly, A third Pretence, upon which Men are induced into ſinful Compliances, is, from a Senſe of their Dependance.

If the Intereſt of any Perſon lies (as ſometimes it doth) in the Hands of wicked Men, there is ſtill greater Difficulty in preſerving their Favour, and our Innocence together. Such a One is preſently counted unworthy of any further Notice, if he does not follow their Lead in all things. He is their Creature; they made him, and, upon That, they found an abſolute Dominion over him. But,

Every Man, at the Great Day of Retribution, muſt anſwer for himſelf, how far he has obeyed the Laws of his Supreme Lord and Maſter, and of his Superiors in this Life, only in Subordination to Him.

But

But Men, who are wholly taken-up with the Affairs and Intereſts of this Life, do not love to caſt their Views forward upon another: and therefore it is almoſt impoſſible, for Perſons of a ſteady and uniform Principle, never to diſpleaſe.

If they do not, on certain Occaſions, ſpiritedly, and perhaps, without Examination, eſpouſe their Patron's Cauſe, they will fall under the heavy Charge of Infidelity, or, perhaps, of wanting what I am to obſerve,

Laſtly, As an Inducement to ſinful Compliances, a Senſe of Gratitude.

This is the moſt ſpecious and ſtrongeſt Colour of all, to excuſe our giving into the Meaſures of our Friends. — We are eaſily carried away with thoſe we love, or who have ſhewn Kindneſs to us: — Ingratitude being always held in the moſt vile Deteſtation. (*)

To avoid, therefore, ſuch an odious Imputation, and to free ourſelves from the Pain of diſobliging thoſe who have, in ſome ſignal Manner obliged us, we ſometimes run into the other Extreme of a ſervile Compliſance; we follow our Friends; we engage in their Deſigns and Intereſts, without ſo much, perhaps, as inquiring into the Reaſons of their Conduct, or whither they are going; or, if we ſtay to have Matters a little explained, our Partiality is apt to biaſs our Judgment, and ſhew us the Way we have a Mind to go. It

(*) See Note (z) Vol. vi. Page 376, 377. Serm. CCCXLI.

It requires great Strength of Mind to argue againſt our Inclination in any Caſe; but where we are actuated by the ſtrong and powerful Motives of Gratitude to our Friends, the Endeavour to argue juſtly, and to ſee things in a clear Light, is ſtill more painful and difficult. But,

It is certain, notwithſtanding, that the Laws of true Gratitude are always conſiſtent with the Laws of God, and the Obedience we owe to him; and He hath an antecedent Right to our Obedience, which no ſubſequent Obligation can cancel. (*)

So that, when there is any ſeeming Repugnancy, between the Reſpects we owe to our Friends, and our Duty to God, it is a clear Caſe on which Side we are to determine ourſelves. "Whether (ſays the Apoſtle) it be right, in the Sight of God, to hearken unto Men, more than unto God, judge ye." He appeals to the known Adverſaries of the Chriſtian Religion for the Deciſion of a Queſtion, which will admit of no Diſpute

(*) Tho we grant there is more than ordinary Difficulty in oppoſing the Deſigns of thoſe we love, and by whom we are beloved; yet no Circumſtances of our Friends, no Pretence of Kindneſs or Gratitude to them, can authorize an unjuſt or ſinful Action.

There is a due Subordination of all the Links in the Chain of Virtues, which God is at the End of. All the Notions, therefore, of our Hearts, and all the Actions of our Lives, are to be regulated by his Laws, and referred to his Honour and Glory.

pute in any Case: a Case evident to every Man. (*)
Upon

(*) As the greatest Temptation to a criminal Obsequiousness arises from a Sense of the Obligations we are under to our Friends, we should consider, whenever we are tempted out of false Shame, or an Apprehension of incurring the Displeasure of our Friends, to an ill thing, that there lies an infinitely superior Obligation upon us to obey the Laws of God, and to make it our constant Endeavour to please him: And if it be a strong Sense of Gratitude that engages us in any criminal Way of serving those that have done us any particular Favour, and which an ingenious Mind so difficultly overcomes; let us reflect upon the Obligations arising from the infinite Goodness and Benificence of God towards us, from our Creation, Preservation, and all the Blessings of this Life, but above all, for his inestimable Love to us in the Redemption of the World by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for the Means of Grace, and the Hopes of Glory: These Things once considered, and *then*, "whether it be right, in the Sight of God, to hearken unto Men more than unto God, judge ye."

The best Way of shewing our Gratitude to those who have done us any signal Favour, is, to be concerned for their Improvement in all worthy and virtuous Attainments; and where decent and proper Occasions offer themselves, to shew them their Mistakes, and to contribute what we can towards rectifying them.

These are the best and most generous Offices we can do for our Friends or Benefactors, and in the End, also, the most acceptable and engaging. He that observes these Measures, and conducts himself by the Rules of Prudence and a just Respect in them, "shall afterwards find more Regard and Favour, than he that flattereth with the Tongue," and consequently is wholly at the Command of others.

Integrity, when known, seldom fails of procuring Love and Esteem; because it is the only Foundation of Trust and Confidence.

Upon the Whole, If there be ſo many Ways of being ſeduced into Sin, and we are ſometimes under ſuch ſtrong Temptations to it by theſe Means, as are not eaſily reſiſted, it concerns us to guard with ſo much the greater Care and Caution againſt them, that we may be "ſincere and without Offence, till the Day of Chriſt;" that great and awful Day, which God hath appointed for the final Judgment of Mankind, when it will be enough to terrify the very beſt of us to conſider how we ſhall be able to render an Account for the Sins we commit thro' the Corruption of our own Nature, without adding to their Number, thro the evil Inſtigations and Examples of others. But,

I am inſenſibly anticipating what I mean further to ſhew, [viz] That a Compliance with the Enticements of others, is no leſs dangerous than unreaſonable.

It is not the ſhutting our Eyes againſt the Light, and reſiſting the Evidences of Truth, that will alter the Reality and Nature of things. Vice and Wickedneſs are na-

and an Argument of an ingenious Temper of Mind. But ſervile and low Submiſſions, do not ſo often recommend Men to Favour, as expoſe them to Cenſure. Sometimes, indeed, they are rewarded, becauſe Great Men do not always beſtow their Favours with Regard to the Merits of Men, but as they are ſubſervient to their Deſigns; and when their Deſigns are ſerved, they cannot but look upon thoſe Perſons, who, upon any mean and diſhonourable Motives, engaged in them, with a ſecret Contempt and Averſion.

naturally productive of Misery; and besides the ill Effects they seldom fail to have upon the Blessings of this Life, they certainly tend to destroy the Felicity of the next. — If any, therefore, are of so profligate a Disposition as not only to do wickedly themselves, but endavour to persuade others also to it, entering into a sinful Commerce with them, and so go over, as it were, to the Interests of Hell, and the opposite Powers of Darkness, and serve the Designs of that Wicked One "who still works in the Children of Disobedience," let us avoid them, and beware of our own Souls, lest we be enticed by their Example, and so be "consumed in the joint Iniquity." For, tho' the Practice of enticing others to Sin, be very great, and involves such in a double Transgression; yet, the consenting to them is unreasonable and dangerous: in some Cases, more so; where the Modesty of the Adviser prevents him from perpetrating what his Vassals stand ready to execute: or when, not under Circumstances of Temptation, he adviseth another to Evil, who is highly provoked, and he doth it. In these Cases, tho he be evil that giveth evil Counsel, yet more wicked is he that executeth the same; for it matters not who was the Occasion of Evil to us, if we, thro' their Enticements, are drawn into Sin.

It is only by our withstanding the Temptations to evil, that we become as valiant Soldiers of Christ, who

"reſiſted even unto Blood," and withſtood all Oppoſition; rejecting Kingdoms and Crowns, yea, even the whole World, and the Glory of it, when placed in Competition with his Soul, and the Senſe of his Duty. — In a Word,

Both they that are ſo wicked as to endeavour to corrupt us, and to make the World worſe than it is; and they that are ſo fooliſh and unſtable as to be drawn away by them, ſhould conſider well the End and Conſequences of it, that "the End of theſe things is Death;" whereas, "the Gift of God," to thoſe who patiently continue in well-doing, "is eternal Life;" to the Well-adviſers firſt, and to the obedient Followers alſo, "thro' Jeſus Chriſt our Lord."

I ſhall now recommend ſome Rules to your Conduct, which may preſerve you from the Impreſſions of ſo importunate, and dangerous a Temptation. — And,

1ſt. The moſt effectual Preſervative of our Virtue, is to avoid, as far as is poſſible, the Converſation of wicked Men.

If indeed we would wholy decline evil Company, we muſt renounce human Society, and (as the Apoſtle ſays,) "go out of the World." But it is in our Power to confine our Friendſhips and Intimacies to Men of Virtue and Religion.

The Righteous are not ſo failed from the Earth, but

but we may find good Men enough for the Support and Entertainments of Society; Men whose Converſation will weaken the Influence of vicious Examples, inſtruct our Ignorance, relieve our Modeſty, and give Courage and Aſſurance in the Duties of our Profeſſion. — But becauſe the Buſineſs and Affairs of Life will ſometimes unavoidably engage us in the Converſation of wicked Men; let us,

2dly, Arm ourſelves with an habitual Reſolution never to communicate with them in their Vices, nor to ſuffer any Friendſhip or Relation, any Example or Authority to prevail on us to deſert the Truth of Chriſt, or act any thing in Contradiction to our Duty to God. — And,

3dly, We ſhall be very much aſſiſted in forming and executing this Reſolution, if we inure ourſelves to expreſs our Abhorrence and Averſion to Vice, and with a decent Freedom reprove every Action that affronts the Majeſty of God, and encourages Men to think ſlightly of the Duties of Religion. By This we ſhall confirm both our own and other's Virtue.

The Libertine himſelf will treat us with Reverence and Reſpect, and inſtead of attempting to corrupt our Integrity, will conceal and diſguiſe his own Vices, and be afraid of incurring ſo venerable a Cenſure. By this Conduct we may hope to retrieve the public Credit of

Religion, reform the Example of the Age, and leſſen the Danger we complain of.

And that we may never want Courage to attempt and perſevere in ſo glorious a Work, let us, above all things, poſſeſs our Souls with awful Apprehenſions of the Majeſty and Sovereignty of God, with an habitual Reverence for his Laws, and Zeal for his Honour.

Let us remember that we were born his Servants and Subjects; and whenever we are tempted by the Perſuaſion, the Example, or Commands of Men, to do or approve any thing contrary to the Duties we are enjoined, let us reflect that we have a prior and ſuperior Obligation to the Commands of Chriſt, and the Laws preſcribed to us by our Creator; and that the Pattern recommended to our Imitation, is not the mixed and imperfect Virtues even of the beſt Men, but the Purity of the Father which is in Heaven, and the Example of him "who knew no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth."

And let us then reflect on the infinite Power and Juſtice of this Almighty Being, his Ability to reward our Service, and to revenge our Contempt of his Authority. Let us conſider the vaſt Diſproportion between the worſt Inconveniences that can attend our Incompliance with Men, and the eternal Diſpleaſure of an offended God. How

How trifling an Apprehenſion is the Shame of being laughed at by Fools, when compared with that Confuſion of Face, that everlaſting Shame and Aſtoniſhment, which ſhall overwhelm the Sinner, when he ſhall appear before the Tribunal of Chriſt, and hear every Sin of his Life produced in the Preſence of God and his Angels? And how deſpicable are the Threats and Reproaches of a Creature, frail, mortal, and impotent as ourſelves; when compared with the Wrath of an Almighty Judge, whoſe Power extends to eternal Inflictions, and who can caſt both Body and Soul into Hell?

And let us then reflect that this great, this holy, and terrible Being is preſent to all our Actions, ſees every treacherous Inclination of our Heart to deſert his Service, and treaſures up againſt the Day of his Wrath the ſecret Cowardice which deters us from aſſerting his Cauſe, which prevails on us to compliment the Vices of the Great, to applaud the Libertine, and laugh with the Profane.

And laſtly, To theſe juſt and awful Apprehenſions of the Deity, let us add our humble and conſtant Prayers to the Throne of Grace, that he would lead and ſupport us with his Spirit thro this Vale of Temptation, give Strength and Courage to our Weakneſs, and enable us ſo to paſs thro the Waves of this trouble-

ſome World, that we may come to the Land of everlaſting Life; be received into the bleſſed Society of thoſe Servants of God, who have preſerved their Integrity, amidſt all the Difficulties which the Malice or Flattery of Men could add to their Duty; who have fought their Way thro all the various Solicitations of the World, thro evil Report and good Report, through Shame and Applauſe, "and are entered into the Reſt of their Lord." — To Conclude,

Let us conſider with how ſwift a Progreſs Religion would prevail in the World, were not Men aſhamed of That which is their greateſt Glory, were they as bold and reſolute in owning and practiſing Religion, as Others are in propagating the corrupt Notions and vicious Manners of the Age.

What a mighty Efficacy would Holineſs have, did Thoſe of the higheſt Ranks and Fortunes "let their Light ſhine before Men!" It would be beautifully terrible to the Combination of Sinners, and chaſe-away Immorality and Prophaneneſs. And all that have any Regard to Reaſon will ſecond it with their Judgment and due Approbation: — and even they that behold the Goodneſs afar off, will admire it. And when the End of all things is come, to thoſe who have held-faſt their Integrity God will do Honour before an innumerable Multitude; and there ſhall be no Speech nor Language but what ſhall ſpeak their Praiſe. Sermon

SERMON CCCXLII.

On fraternal Reproof: in Oppoſition to complying with the Enticement of Sinners.

Heb. iii. 13. "Exhort one another daily while it is "called, To-day, leſt any of you be hardened "through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin."

Reproof, though peculiarly a Part of the Miniſterial Office, as being more able and qualified to diſcharge it with Succeſs, is yet a Duty incumbent on all Chriſtians; (*) and though it is confeſſedly a moſt ungrateful Taſk, is yet the greateſt Inſtance of Charity to the Souls of Men, as well as the moſt honourable Employ to ourſelves. — For,

When we are inſtrumental in converting Sinners from the Evil of their Ways, and bringing them to Repentance, we engage in the Deſigns of God, we labour in

(*) —— —— "What could I do more,
"I warned thee, I admoniſhed thee, foretold
"The Danger, and the lurking Enemy
"That lay in wait." *Milton*

in the ſame glorious Work with his Miniſters, the holy Angels, we occaſion to our Fellow-labourers, a freſh Scene of Joy in Heaven: (*) It will require, therefore, but little to be ſaid in Order to enforce Chriſtians to ſo juſt, ſo charitable and heavenly an Employment, and withal ſo beneficial to themſelves. And,

Firſt, This is one of the Methods, which the Wiſdom of God himſelf has appointed in Order to reclaim Sinners from the evil of their Ways.

The Command of Moſes is very full and expreſs to this Purpoſe, — "Thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy Neighbour, and not ſuffer Sin upon him." And the Apoſtle to the ſame Purpoſe, "Have no Fellowſhip with the unfruitful Works of Darkneſs, but rather reprove them." As if, to omit reproving a Sinner, were virtually, and in Effect, granting him a Licence and Permiſſion to ſin, and that we, in ſo doing, become [under] Partakers

ſon as not to yield to the Force of Religion, when it is ſet in a clear and true Light before them.

Indeed, — The beſt of Men have need of a conſtant Monitor: The Capacity of our Minds is ſo narrow, that we cannot diſtinctly attend to all the Duties of Religion at all Times. And our Memory is ſo frail that we cannot, on every Occaſion, recollect the proper and particular Motives to our Duty: Beſides, we eaſily forget

(*) See Luke xv. 7, 10.

forget our Faults when they are not taken-notice-of by others, who oftentimes ſee things better than the Actors themſelves. (*)

It is therefore right, and we frequently want to be "ſtirred up," both by wholeſome Advice, and by being "put in Remembrance." — Yet,

It is not hereby intended that we ſhould take upon us, at all Adventures, to give others religious Advice, in all things, (‡) though we really mean well by it; for, This being an Office of Prudence and Diſcretion, great Caution and Addreſs is to be uſed in it; the Inclinations of others are various, and perhaps, differ ſo widely from ours, that there will need much Skill to compoſe the Diſcord into Harmony; neither all Times, nor all Places, nor all Perſons are alike fit for it; all, therefore that we deſign, is, that where favourable Circumſtances concur to render our Advice proper and effectual to reſtrain other Men from Sin, and the Caſes are urgent, in ſuch Caſes, and in ſuch only, we are obliged to give it, as we tender the Salvation of our Souls, and would free

(*) *Comparata eſt Hominum Natura omnium, aliena ut mollis videant, et dijudicent, quàm ſua. Sibi quiſque Adulator eſt.*

(‡) We ought not to reprehend for any innocent Freedom, nor for every trifling Indecency; but only for plain and unqueſtionable Treſpaſſes upon Religion, leſt our Reproofs be looked upon as the Language of Pride or Ill-Nature; and, by their Frequency in *every* thing, loſe their Effect in *any* thing. Serm. CCCXLII.

Partakers with him in his Wickedneſs. And the Text, "Exhort one another daily, whilſt it is called To-Day," (i.e. frequently, and while ye have Opportunity, and with ſome Hopes of Succeſs,) "leſt any of you be hardened thro' the Deceitfulneſs of Sin."

All which Places expreſs to us the natural Efficacy which a juſt and ſeaſonable Reproof has, to bring a Sinner to a Senſe of his Sins, and to check him from going on impenitently in them.

It is a Duty, &c. ☞ (under)

It is a Duty, both of Piety and poſitive Command, that we ſhould "admoniſh one another," and conſult the proper Ways of mutual Edification, as by that Means, we may be the happy Occaſions of hindering Men from falling into Sin, or of recovering them when fallen.

A Word of Advice, ſpoken in Seaſon, charitably deſigned, and aptly applied, though from a Perſon who has no direct Authority over us, yet carries a great Weight and Perſuaſion along with it, and makes more Impreſſion than Tropes and Figures. — For,

There are few Men ſo far loſt to all Senſe of Reaſon as not to yield to the Force of Religion, when it is ſet in a clear and true Light before them.

Indeed, — The beſt of Men have need of a conſtant Monitor: The Capacity of our Minds is ſo narrow, that we cannot diſtinctly attend to all the Duties of Religion at all Times. And our Memory is ſo frail that we cannot, on every Occaſion, recollect the proper and particular Motives to our Duty: Beſides, we eaſily forget

(*) See Luke xv. 7, 10.

forget our Faults when they are not taken-notice-of by others, who oftentimes ſee things better than the Actors themſelves. (*)

It is therefore right, and we frequently want to be "ſtirred up," both by wholeſome Advice, and by being "put in Remembrance." — Yet,

It is not hereby intended that we ſhould take upon us, at all Adventures, to give others religious Advice, in all things, (‡) though we really mean well by it; for, This being an Office of Prudence and Diſcretion, great Caution and Addreſs is to be uſed in it; the Inclinations of others are various, and perhaps, differ ſo widely from ours, that there will need much Skill to compoſe the Diſcord into Harmony; neither all Times, nor all Places, nor all Perſons are alike fit for it; all, therefore that we deſign, is, that where favourable Circumſtances concur to render our Advice proper and effectual to reſtrain other Men from Sin, and the Caſes are urgent, in ſuch Caſes, and in ſuch only, we are obliged to give it, as we tender the Salvation of our Souls, and would free

(*) *Comparata eſt Hominum Natura omnium, aliena ut melius vi-deant, et dijudicent, quàm ſua. Sibi quiſque Adulator eſt.*

(‡) We ought not to reprehend for any innocent Freedom, nor for every trifling Indecency; but only for plain and unqueſtionable Treſpaſſes upon Religion, leſt our Reproofs be looked upon as the Language of Pride or Ill-Nature; and, by their Frequency in *every* thing, loſe their Effect in *any* thing. Serm. CCCXLII.

free ourſelves from all Imputation of their Sin.

St. Paul ſpeaks of it as a particular Commendation of the Romans, that "they were able to admoniſh one another;" and makes it an Argument (very applicable to the preſent) of their being full of Goodneſs, as well as Knowledge; for, it is not a Counſel diſperſed promiſcuouſly, of which few make perſonal Applications, that will do the whole of the Buſineſs before us.

Private Reproof, Inſtruction, and Conſolation muſt be variouſly adminiſtered, according to the different Neceſſities and Tempers of Mankind. Indeed,

The greateſt Abilities are required to qualify us for ſo nice and ungrateful an Office; but which yet becomes, on many Occaſions, indiſpenſibly neceſſary; and yet, (as we generally deſire nothing more than to render ourſelves agreeable to thoſe with whom we converſe) it is with Difficulty we are perſuaded to a Duty which ſo viſibly expoſes us to the Hazard of diſpleaſing.

We ought not, however, to plead Difficulties in Bar of what the Honour and Intereſts of Religion may require of us. The Command is abſolute – "Thou ſhalt not hate thy Brother in thy Heart; thou ſhalt in any wiſe rebuke thy Neighbour, and not ſuffer Sin to reſt upon him: I am the Lord." — Here is no Exception, either as to the Perſon reproving, or the Perſon reproved.

And yet, after all, there is not ſo great Danger, perhaps,

haps, of giving Offence, by a modeſt and ſeaſonable Reproof, as the Backwardneſs of Men, for other Reaſons, to this Duty is apt to heighten their Apprehenſions of. (*)

Solomon, who certainly underſtood human Nature very well, and formed the admirable Rules he hath left us upon his Knowledge of it, lays it down as a Maxim, that, "He who rebuketh ſhall afterwards find more Favour than he that flattereth with the Tongue." (‡)

"Say

(*) None but mean Souls are diſturbed at having their Ignorance reproved; and the Reaſon is, that being generally very blind and fooliſh, they never trouble themſelves with Doubts, and are fully ſatisfied they ſee things clearly, which they ſaw only thro' the thick Miſt of a clouded Underſtanding.

"Open Rebuke is better than ſecret Love; for faithful are the Wounds of a Friend, but the Kiſſes of an Enemy are deceitful."

(‡) Many are led by the Ears, more than by the Underſtanding. Muſick is not more agreeable to a muſical Ear, than Flattery to a vain-glorious Man. It is a Charm that pleaſingly ſooths him; and the wiſeſt of Men have been ſubdued by it: but, we ought no more to receive the Praiſes we do not deſerve, than the Reward that is not due to us. *Qui audit, Serpentem alit.* Flattering Friends are the worſt Enemies. "A Man that flattereth his Neighbour, ſpreadeth a Net for his Feet."

In Amicitiis nullâ Peſtis eſt major, quàm Aſſentatio, Blanditiæ, Adulatio. Lætandum magis Reprehenſoribus quàm Aſſentatoribus: illi enim, veluti Stimulo, Animos excitant; hi verò gratificantes diſſolvunt et ſubvertunt. Adulator, Amicus in Obſequio, Hoſtis in Animo; comptus in Verbo, ſurpis in Facto; Lætus ad proſpera, fragilis ad adverſa; immodicus ad Gaudia, difficilis ad honeſta. (Serm. 342) Wiſh,

"Say not, therefore, Behold, Truth breedeth Hatred,

With, therefore, rather to be reproved by the Wise, than to be applauded by him who hath no Understanding: when they tell thee of a Fault, they suppose thou canst improve: the other, when he praiseth thee, thinketh thee like unto himself.

Qualem commendes, etiàm atque etiàm aspice; ne mox
Incutiunt aliena tibi Peccata Pudorem.

Never commend any Man to his Face, but rather commend him to others, that they may have a good Opinion of him: neither dispraise any Man behind his Back, but rather tell him privately of his Faults, that you may work a Reformation in him. See Mat. 18. 15.

Whenever you commend, add your Reasons for so doing: It is This that distinguishes the Approbation of a Man of Sense, from the Flattery of sycophants, and the Admiration of Fools.

Non qui placet, sed qui benefacit, Vir est.
Coràm laudare, et clàm vituperare, inhonestum est.

Excessive Commendations of any Art, or Science whatsoever, as also of the Learning or Ability of any particular Men or Nations, only prove that the Persons who give such Characters, never heard of any Thing or Person that were more excellent in That Way, and therefore Admiration may as well proceed from their own Ignorance, as from the real Excellency of the Persons or Things; unless their respective Abilities and Excellencies are otherwise known. We are divided in ourselves, and confound Good and Evil: we are moved at the Novelty of Things, for Want of understanding the Reason of them. Admiration, therefore, tho it is the most pleasing Passion, is yet, oftentimes, the Effect of gross Ignorance.

Miratur, Rerumque ignarus, sub Imagine pendet.

Great Admirers are commonly great Fools. We are allowed to say that a Thing pleases us, or to signify by some Sign that we are affected with what we see or hear: But intemperate Outcries and violent

tred, and I will avoid it; Diſſimulation raiſeth Friends, and I will follow it. Are not the Enemies made by Truth, better than the Friends obtained by Flattery?

"Naturally doth Man deſire the Truth; yet when it is before him, he will not apprehend it; and if it force itſelf upon him, is he not offended at it? — The Fault is not in Truth, for that is amiable; but the Weakneſs of Man beareth not Splendor."

Chriſtianity muſt have very little Power over us, if we ſuffer ourſelves to be reſtrained from a known Duty, that is indiſpenſible, upon any worldly Motives whatever — and we muſt be loſt to all Senſe of Compaſſion if we can indifferently behold any one obſtinately purſuing his own Deſtruction, and even forcing his Way

violent Motions, that denote an extraordinary Surprize, are commonly Signs of Impertinence, and of a groveling Soul, fooliſhly prodigal of its Incence.

Admiratio, quæ magna eſt, non parit Verba, ſed Silentium.

It is the Infirmity of poor Spirits to be taken with every Appearance, and dazzled with every Thing that ſparkles: but great Genius's have but little Admiration, becauſe few Things appear new to them.

We ſhould be equally cautious of approving or condemning what deſerves neither Praiſe nor Approbation, That being commonly a Sign of Want of Taſte or an ill Judgment. If we commend any one whom all the World knows does not deſerve it, we muſt paſs either for Fools or Hypocrites. *Laudatore nihil inſidioſius.* Flattery is dangerous; though, in ſome Caſes, a Man may be allowed to commend himſelf. See Note (*), Vol. viii. Page 331, &c. (Serm. 342)

Way to Misery through all the Resistances of his Religion, and Reason, and Conscience together, without endeavouring to call him back, and bind him down with wholesome Advice and good Counsel; which we are to endeavour at by all prudent and seasonable Reproofs, by all pious, compassionate, and friendly Admonitions, to reclaim him from the Error of his Way: for, thus doth our holy Religion direct us.

Sin is of so delusory and flattering a Nature, that it not only corrupts the Heart, but blinds the Eyes of Men, that they either do not, or will not see their own Actions in a just Light. "Every One that doth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reproved."

It is certain, when we indulge ourselves in any Sin, especially "the Sin that more easily besets us," as it always speaks favourably for itself, so we are as much inclined to give it a favourable Hearing. We must, therefore, call in foreign Aid, and find, if we can, some friendly and charitable Hand to point out our Mistakes to us, and set us right. (*)

But, supposing the Understanding rightly informed, and in no Ways influenced by the Motives and Maxims of Self-Love in the Judgment it makes of our Actions; yet we are strangely apt to forget the religious

(*) See Note (*), Page 115.

Truths

Truths we hear, and eſpecially ſuch of them as are moſt oppoſite to our prevailing Temper and Inclination. A Remembrancer, therefore, is uſeful to the wiſeſt, and beſt, and moſt circumſpect of us, frequently to refreſh our Memory, and "to provoke us to Love and to good Works."

The great Neceſſity of this Duty, being thus evinced, I ſhall proceed to lay before you ſome of the proper Regulations to be obſerved in it. — And,

Firſt, Great Tenderneſs and Compaſſion muſt be uſed to give our Reproofs the greater Force and Efficacy; for "the Wrath of Man worketh not the Righteouſneſs of God."

We muſt make thoſe whom we admoniſh ſenſible that we have a hearty and real Concern for their Good and Welfare; and, that This is the principal Motive upon which we take upon us ſo ungrateful an Office.

It was with this Temper the Apoſtle proceeded in his reproving certain Diſorders among the Corinthians: he tells them, "that with much Affliction and Anguiſh of Heart, he wrote unto them with many Tears; not that they ſhould be grieved, but that they ſhould know the Love he had more abundantly unto them." And, he preſcribes the ſame Temper and Lenity to others, of which he was ſo eminent an Inſtance himſelf: — "If any Man be overtaken in a Fault, ye,

which are ſpiritual, reſtore ſuch a one in the Spirit of Meekneſs." — But,

Beſides the natural Propriety of this Method to produce the deſigned Effect, (for we never have a readier Acceſs to the Hearts of Men, than when they perceive we have a real Concern for their Intereſts;) the Apoſtle adds a very perſuaſive and particular Argument to enforce his Advice: — recommending it to the Perſon reproving, to "conſider himſelf leſt he alſo be tempted." — And indeed,

The more we retire into ourſelves, and examine our own Qualifications and Conduct, the more candid and modeſt we ſhall be in the Judgment we make of other Men. — That Charity, which "hopeth and believeth all things," will, (tho the Practice of the World is the very Reverſe) impute the Sins of Others to ſuch Conſiderations as rather leſſen, than aggravate them. The Perſon we reprove, has offended, perhaps, in ſome great and known Inſtance — but, might he not, in great Meaſure, be ſurprized into it, or did it thro Ignorance, and not with any malicious Intention; or, he was under ſome very preſſing and dangerous Circumſtances of Temptation.

Theſe are the Alleviations which a Perſon of Candor will frame in Excuſe for the Sins and Failings of other Men: — but how far they are applicable to himſelf,

ſelf, he is to judge, not by the Rules of Charity, but by Evidence, and the Report of his own Conſcience.

Let us obſerve to this Purpoſe the great Decency and ingenious Temper of the Apoſtle, in ſpeaking of other Men's Sins; "If any Man be OVER-TAKEN with a Fault:" — conſidering him as rather PASSIVE in what he has done, as rather flying from, and caught by Temptation, than advancing to meet it.

Not that theſe alleviating Circumſtances for the Sins of other Men, which Charity ought in moſt Caſes to ſuppoſe, will excuſe them; but when we conſider how apt we alſo are, of ourſelves, to be tempted, and how often we have been actually tempted to commit Sin; This is certainly a very good Reaſon why we ſhould animadvert on the Faults of other Men with great Tenderneſs, and with more Grains of Allowance.

When we give our Advice in a ſupercilious magiſterial Manner, we do it rather to ſhow our own Authority and Superiority in Wiſdom, than to benefit the Party concerned. — We muſt, therefore, conſult the gentleſt Manner and ſofteſt Seaſons of Addreſs. Our advice muſt not fall, like a violent Storm, bearing down and making that to droop, which it was meant to cheriſh and revive.

It muſt deſcend as the "Dew upon the tender

Herb," the ſofter it falls, the longer it dwells upon, and the deeper it ſinks into the Mind.

If there are few who have the Humility to receive Advice as they ought, it is often, becauſe there are as few who have the Diſcretion to convey it in a proper Vehicle, and to qualify the Harſhneſs of their Reproof, againſt which corrupt Nature is apt to revolt, by an artful Sweetning and agreeable Ingredients.—To probe the Wound to the Bottom with all the Boldneſs and Reſolution of a good ſpiritual Surgeon, and yet with all the Delicacy and Tenderneſs of a Friend, requires a very dexterous and maſterly Hand. – an affable Deportment, and a Complacency of Behaviour, will diſarm the moſt obſtinate: Whereas, if, inſtead of calmly pointing out their Miſtakes, we break out into unſeemly Sallies of Paſſion, we ceaſe to have any Influence. Gentleneſs is the beſt, if not the only Way to be heard; whereas, to be paſſionate, bitter, and uncharitable, rather exaſperates, than ſubdues; eſpecially with thoſe who have been long hardened in their Perverſeneſs, where probably all Reproof will be loſt. — Therefore,

Though it be always right to be zealouſly affected in a good Matter, yet, we are not obliged to reprove where we have no Reaſon to hope we can do any good. (*) There

(*) Where the End cannot be obtained, the Obligation ceaſes.

There are ſome of ſo profligate a Diſpoſition as to turn Reproof into Faction, and ſin more daringly for Admonition. Solomon, therefore, and a greater than Solomon, our Saviour himſelf, has forbid us to miſplace our Reproof upon ſuch incorrigible Sinners: "He that reproveth a Scorner (ſaith Solomon) getteth to himſelf Shame;" (*) and our Saviour commands us "not to give That which is holy unto Dogs, nor caſt our Pearl before Swine." (‡) But,

Where

(*) *Obſequium Amicos, Veritas Odium parit.*
Fallit te incautum Pietas tua.

(‡) It is difficult for a Man to have Senſe and to be a Knave. A true and ſharp Genius conducts to Order, Truth, and Virtue. It is the Want of Senſe and Penetration which makes a Man as obſtinate in Evil, as in Error. We ſtrive in vain to correct a Blockhead by Satire, which deſcribes him to Others, while he himſelf will not know his own Picture; it is like railing to a deaf Man. Where there is no Capacity, there Perſuaſion is in vain: for "Wiſdom cannot be profitable to a Fool."

Ut Agro ſterili et infœcundo fruſtrà immittuntur Semina: ità ſtolido et infulſo Animo parùm valent ſalutaria Præcepta.

Laterem lavat qui Corvum mundare conatur; non enim abſterget Nigredinem Corvus. A ſinful Man will not be reproved, but findeth an Excuſe according to his Will. *Sicut nec Auris eſcas, nec Gutter Verba cognoſcit: ità, nec Stultus Sapientiam Sapientis intelligit. Nugas agis. Surdo Fabulam narras. Nigræ Lanarum nullum bibunt Colorum. Malo qui benefacit, pejorem facit. Siniſtra et intempeſtiva Monitio et Morbum exaſperat, et ex Amico reddit Inimicum.* Whereas,

"Rebuke a wiſe Man, and he will love thee, and he will be yet

Where our Admonition or Reproof may be with good Effect, there we are always to do it in a proper and gentle Manner. But,

Though our Reproofs, for the moſt Part, muſt be meek and gentle, as beſt agreeing with the Temper and Genius of the Goſpel, yet ſometimes it may be needful to uſe Sharpneſs of Speech. (*) In ſome Caſes, which will not admit of any mitigating Conſiderations, we ought, (according to the Apoſtle's Advice,) when we reprove a Sinner, to riſe in our Reſentments, according to the Character of the Perſon, and the Nature and Quality of his Crimes, and to "rebuke him ſharply;" ſo, as to convince him we are in earneſt; that "he may be ſound in the Faith."

But This is only proper upon ſome extraordinary Occaſions; in general, a mild and gentle Treatment

the wiſer: teach a juſt Man, and he will increaſe Learning." "A Reproof entereth more into a wiſe Man, than an hundred Stripes into a Fool." "Speak not in the Ears of a Fool, for he will deſpiſe thy Words."

(*) Chiding and Rebukes ſhould be generally mild and gentle; but nevertheleſs ſuch as may carry Weight and Authority along with them: ever obſerving a Mean betwixt too great Eaſineſs, and breaking out into angry and contumelious Language: It is for this Reaſon, that illiterate Men often perſuade more effectually than the Learned, becauſe they ſeem to ſpeak more naturally, and from a feeling Senſe. *Sæpè etiàm eſt Olitor valdè opportuna ſequutus.*

To reprove a Man lightly or paſſionately, derides or reproaches him for his Sin, but never reclaims him from it.

ment will be the moſt effectual, eſpecially with our Superiors, whom we are to rebuke but at a reſpectful Diſtance.

This leads me to conſider further, another Regulation of this Duty, with Reſpect to the Quality of the Perſon reproved.

As People never think themſelves more injured by us, than when we fail in the Reſpect due to any particular Character they are inveſted with, we muſt never think of gaining their Attention, where we ſeem in the leaſt wanting in our Regards to them; for this Reaſon we ought, as little as poſſible, to give our Admonitions to our Superiors the Air of Reproof. In this Caſe, the very Name of it, as it imports ſomething of Authority, ſounds harſh and aſſuming, gives Offence, and probably would be of no Uſe; it is therefore prudent to inſinuate them with Artifice and polite Addreſs.

The Apoſtle ſeems to ſoften, and expreſs this Conduct by a Term which gives the Mind a more eaſy and agreeable Idea, "Rebuke not an Elder, (ſays he) but intreat him as a Father." — The ſame Decency is to be obſerved with Reſpect to Perſons of any Eminence above us, in any Character.

So that if it be neceſſary, as upon ſome Occaſions it may, to lay the Faults of ſuch Perſons before them, we are to do it, at once, in the moſt diſtant and the

moſt reſpectful Manner. This is what Elihu inſinuates in theſe Words in Job: "Is it fit to ſay to a King, thou art wicked; or to Princes, ye are ungodly?" He does not intend, that the greateſt Perſonages are wholly exempt from Reproof, eſpecially by thoſe who are in their Confidence, or miniſter to them in things ſacred; but only deſigns, that we ſhould ſhew them their Faults as decently, and in as remote and inoffenſive a Manner, as the Nature of them will bear. Their Places and Callings require Reverence and Reſpect; therefore, towards ſuch, our Reproofs ſhould be ſo framed, as to appear rather Intreaties than Rebukes. (*)

There is, indeed, a peculiar Method of applying theſe our Admonitions, which will make them of more Benefit and Advantage to the obtaining our End than otherwiſe they would be, and which was eminently ſeen in the Practice of our Lord and Saviour, [viz.] in diſtant and parabolic Expreſſions; for, by this Means, in his

(*) It is Matter of Prudence, not to out-do One's Maſter. All Superiority is odious, but in a Subject over his Prince, it is very fooliſh or fatal. An accompliſhed Man conceals common Advantages, as a modeſt Woman hides her Beauty under a negligent Dreſs. There are many who would yield in good Fortune, or good Humour, but no One will yield in good Wit, and leaſt of all a Sovereign. Princes are willing to be aſſiſted, but not ſurpaſſed; thoſe who adviſe them, ought to ſpeak as if they put them in Mind of what they had forgot, and not as teaching them what they know not.

his excellent Wiſdom," He brought his Enemies to an Acknowledgment and Confeſſion of their Faults, which otherwiſe, had he addreſſed them in plain and direct Terms, it would have been impoſſible for him to have done; for they would, in the firſt Place, have ſeen his Deſign, and ſo avoided the End of his Intention, [viz] the Confeſſion of their Sins, and their due deſerved Puniſhments. (*) — By thus univerſally condemning Sin, without SINGULARLY reproving it, He forbids it, in GENERAL, and evades the Neceſſity of reproving it in PARTICULAR. So excellent an Example has he ſet us to correct Sin, and conceal the Sinner, and to ſuppreſs Tranſgreſſion, without diſcovering the Tranſgreſſor.

The true Art of Praiſe, no leſs than of Panegyrick conſiſts

(*) ——— —— *Longa eſt Injuria, longa*
Ambages. — Great is the Injury, and long the Tale.

Some People are not to be dealt with, but by a Train of Myſtery and Circumlocution; a downright Admonition looks more like the Reproach of an Enemy, than the Advice of a Friend; or, at beſt, it is but the good Office of a Man that has an ill Opinion of us; and we do not naturally love to be told of our Faults by the Witneſſes of our Failings. — To uſe too many Circumſtances before we come to the Matter, is weariſome; (ſee No. 138, of the Spectator,) to uſe none, is blunt. Brevity is a great Praiſe of Eloquence. It is a ſpecial Virtue to ſpeak little and well.

The Art of pleaſing in Company, is, not to explain things too circumſtantially; but to expreſs one Part, and leave your Hearers to make out the reſt.

conſiſts in ſaying things indirectly: the leſs we appear, therefore, at firſt View, to deſign either to praiſe or reprove, the more agreeably we ſurprize and awaken the Attention; ſo that, generally, the neareſt Way to bring our Reproofs home to the Conſcience of a Sinner, is by diſtant Hints, and ſimilar, parabolick Caſes.

Thus Nathan reduced David; and thus, in numberleſs Inſtances, were the ſtubborn Phariſees repelled, reduced and reclaimed. — For,

A Reproof hath more Effect, when it comes through the Faults of another, whoſe Defects are more plainly ſeen, than when levelled directly at the Perſon. (*)

This is hinted to the wiſe, (‡) who will find Means to ſuit their treatment properly, in every Caſe, with the more Exalted and Wary; whom to reprove, in direct Terms, might be either diſtaſteful, or deſtructive of their Purpoſe. (†)

We

(*) See No. 512, of the Spectator. (‡) *Verbum Sapienti ſat eſt.*

(†) It is not inconſiſtent with good Manners to acquaint Mankind with their Failings: the Difficulty is only to do it without offending; and proportionably as the Difficulty is, ſo ought our Endeavours to be, that we obtain ſo deſirable an End.

To inform others of their Faults, without gilding the bitter Potion, and ſmoothing the unwelcome Tale, is a ſure Way of raiſing their Anger, without the Proſpect of any Palliative to ſoften their Indignation.

Dante, a celebrated Genius, found a Refuge in Exile, and was again diſgraced for ſpeaking Truth unguardedly. "How

We may with Civility glance at, but cannot, without Rudeneſs and Affront, ſpeak directly to the Faults and Imperfections of others.

This indirect Way, far more effectually gains its Point.

"How comes it, (ſaid the Prince his Protector to him) that you, Dante, with all your Wiſdom, have ſo little Attention paid to you, when yonder Buffoon, who is noted only for Obſcenity and Immorality is courted by every one." "It is (retorted Dante haſtily) becauſe his Manners and his Companions are ſimilar." — This very probably might be a Fact; but it could anſwer no good Purpoſe to ſpeak a Truth ſo bitterly. It did not; and Dante was obliged to ſeek another Aſylum.

As it is inconſiſtent with good Manners, as well as Self-intereſt, to utter Truths thus harſhly, ſo alſo is Pride an utter Enemy to Politeneſs and Civility.

An arrogant and ſupercilious Behaviour, a haughty Spirit, and a domineering Eye, which is diſcovered not only in the Dreſs of Elegance and Fashion, but alſo in the moſt plain and apparently modeſt Garb, will render Perſons deſpiſed inwardly, whatever outward Reſpect may be paid to their ſuperior Rank; and when Opportunity offers, they are ſure of being repaid with Intereſt.

The great Diogenes ſaid to the great Plato, when walking on his rich Carpets, - "now I trample on the Pride of Plato." — "Yes, (replied the humble Philoſopher) but with far more Pride."

A proper Medium ſhould be obſerved. A Man ſhould ſtudy the Taſte of Others, to be able to inſinuate himſelf into them, that the Advice he gives may have its Effect, without diſguſting. Leſſons and Precepts ought to be gilt and ſweetned, as we do Pills and Potions, ſo as to take off the Diſguſt of the Remedy; for it holds both in Virtue and in Health, that we love to be inſtructed as well as phyſicked with Pleaſure. Serm. CCCXLII.

Point, becauſe it reproves without the Sharpneſs of a Reproach; and withall ſpares the Offender, who hath forgot himſelf, the Confuſion of a Bluſh. If the Fault be of no Conſequence, it is better to ſeem ignorant of it, than to cenſure it. (*) But if it be of that Nature, that we are obliged in Duty, Decency, and Friendſhip, to admoniſh him that is guilty of it, it ought to be done with all the Softneſs and Precaution poſſible.

This brings me to another Qualification of a juſt Reproof, [viz] the Seaſonableneſs of it.

In all the Addreſſes we make to other Perſons, the well-timing of them is of ſingular Advantage. An open Rebuke is apt to irritate thoſe who have the greateſt Command of their Tempers, eſpecially where they ſuſpect any Perſon by whom they are rebuked, to be their Enemy; or when they are under any Diſorder of Mind, or in the Heat of their Paſſion.

On ſuch Occaſions a Reproof will neither be well-received, nor find Room for Admittance. We muſt therefore, in theſe Caſes, as in moſt others, when we would engage any Perſon, obſerve the Diſpoſition he is in, and whether he be duly acceſſible. We muſt forbear the Sinner, till his Paſſion is ſomewhat pacified, till his Mind is ſedate and calm, and beſt diſpoſed to

(*) See Note (‡), Page 113.

attend

attend to, and receive, a pious Reprehenſion. (*) For,

He that reproves another when his Mind is diſordered by Paſſion, or Intemperance, doth only (according to the Apoſtle's Phraſe) "ſpeak into the Air," for then "he refuſeth to hear the Voice of the Charmer, charm he ever ſo wiſely." (†)

There is no forcing Nature againſt her Bias, nor inverting the due Method and Order of things, which, for a while, will have their Courſe; but, when the Paſſion cools, and the Sinner is fit to receive a Reprehenſion, we ought to give it with the greateſt Meekneſs, Seriouſneſs, and Compaſſion; (‡) repreſenting his Crime to him with ſuch a tender Senſe of the Evil and Danger of it as may convince him, that That which renders us ſo ſevere to his Sin, is mere Charity to his Soul. (¶)

A

(*) *Ut in tumultu non audimus quid nobis dicatur; ità, irati non admittimus diligentem Conſilium. Ut hæc ultimæ Aquâ turbidâ, niſi conſiterit, multò minùs utendum eſt Animo commoto, priuſquàm ad ſe redierit.* Have not to do with any Man in his Paſſion, for Men are not like Iron, to be wrought upon when they are hot. "A Word ſpoken in due Seaſon, how good is it!" See Vol. x. Page 398, &c.

(†) *In Febre acutâ ſurdeſcere, furioſum.*

(‡) Him that is angry, we muſt not oppoſe with Anger; for a Madneſs is not cured by another's growing mad.

(¶) If we ſee a Vice in any Man, we ſhould reprove the Vice, without reproaching the Perſon. We ought not to hate the Man, but his Sins and Offences only. Serm. CCCXLII.

(*)

A due Regard alſo is to be had to the eaſy and favourable Moments of attending the Great, in all our Applications to them; (*) but never more than when we come before them in the Quality of Monitors; an Office ſeldom very acceptable at beſt, except to ſuch as have the leaſt Need of it. "A Word ſpoken in Seaſon, how good is it! It is like unto Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver; as an Earing of Gold, and an Ornament of fine Gold; ſo is a wiſe Reprover upon an obedient Ear, and wiſe Reproofs uttered in due Seaſon."

What Gracefulneſs there is in Colours judiciouſly choſen, and rightly adjuſted; what Agreeableneſs there is in the moſt valuable Metals, ſo appoſitely placed as to add to each other's Luſtre; what Beauty ariſes from the richeſt and choiceſt Ornaments; ſuch is the Gracefulneſs, ſuch is the Excellency, ſuch is the Beauty of a wiſe Reproof fitted to the Occaſion of it, to the Perſon and the Character of thoſe that reprove, and of thoſe who are reproved. But,

When a Reproof is abruptly introduced by thoſe, who have more Zeal than, perhaps, either Diſcretion or good Manners, how inſignificant, not to ſay (what the Authority of Solomon would juſtify) how fooliſh is it? for, "a Fool (as he obſerves) will always be talking, but a wiſe Man will keep a Word for afterwards." But, Though

(*) *In Tempore ad eam rem, quod omnium Rerum eſt optimum.* Terent.

Though we are allowed in this Manner to reprove the Faults of our Friends, yet, we are to remember, that this is to be done in private: "We are to debate the Matter with our Brother alone," and muſt take all poſſible Care, on our Parts, to conceal it from the Knowledge of others, and avoid expoſing the Offender, as much as the Rules of Charity will admit: "leſt he that heareth it, put thee to Shame, and thine Infamy turn not away." (*) This

(*) To keep ourſelves, in all Caſes, from Suſpicion of deſigning any thing againſt the Reputation of thoſe we reprove, Prudence requires we ſhould ſhew them their Faults without attacking their Perſons; becauſe there is nothing that imbitters the Spirits of Men more, or renders them ſo incapable of wiſe Counſel, as when they ſuppoſe themſelves reflected upon and ill-uſed.

The Rule our Saviour gives, that "if our Brother treſpaſs againſt us, we ſhould tell him privately of his Faults," is to be obſerved with Reſpect to all other Matters that we are not under an Obligation to diſcover out of Regard to the Intereſts of the State, or the Juſtice we owe to private Perſons, or where the Honour of Religion is not nearly concerned. — And,

For the Method of our performing this, what Courſe we are to take, and how far we are to proceed in it, our Saviour may ſeem to have ſet That down, according to what had obtained in the Jewiſh Cuſtom "If thy Brother ſhall treſpaſs againſt thee," take this Courſe to reclaim him; "Go firſt and tell him of his Fault, *privately*, between thee and him alone; if he ſhall hear thee," and amend upon thy Admonition, thy Work is done, and without any more ado, "thou haſt gained thy Brother." "But if he" be not to be won thus eaſily, and "will not hear thee" admoniſhing him thus private-

This is an Argument that our Admonitions proceed from Friendſhip, and that it is not our Deſign to diſgrace, but to reform. (*) Theſe

ly by thy ſelf alone; "then" give not over, but go one Step further, "take with thee One or Two more" to join with thee in thy Admonition, that by the Authority of their Concurrence, he may be the more prevailed upon, and that the Reproof now appearing, not in thy Mouth alone, but alſo "in the Mouths of thy two or three Witneſſes, every Word may have the more Effect, and be the firmlier eſtabliſhed." "And if he" ſhall be incorrigible ſtill, and "neglect to hear both thee and them too;" yet give him not over for a loſt Man, but try one Means more, which is the laſt that I look for, "tell it unto the Church," and reprove him before all them. "But if he prove obſtinate againſt this laſt Means, and "neglect to hear them;" then thou haſt diſcharged thyſelf, and needeſt to look no further after him till he ſhews a better Mind, but mayeſt "let him be unto thee thenceforward as a" loſt and hardened Man, whoſe Converſion thou art no longer bound in vain to labour after, ſuch as we are wont to expreſs by a "Heathen Man and a Publican."

The above Method of Expoſtulation with Sinners is thus deſcribed by Druſius from the Jews, in the Caſe.

"*Qui arguit Socium ſuum, debet primùm hoc facere, placidè inter ſe et ipſum ſolum, Verbis mollibus, ità ut non pudefaceat eum. Si reſipiſcit, benè eſt; ſin, debet eumacriùs arguere, et pudefacere inter ſe et ipſum. Si non reſipiſcat, debet adhibere Socios, ipſumquè coràm illis Pudore afficere: ſi nec modò quicquàm proficit, debet eum pudefacere coràm multis, ejusquè Delictum publicare. Nàm certè delegendi ſunt Hypocritæ.*"

(*) We ought never to diſcover the Imperfections of an Huſband before his Wife, of a Father before his Children, of a Suitor in Company with his Friends, nor of Maſters in the Preſence of their Scholars, (i.e) of Superiors before their Inferiors: for it touches a Man

to

These are the faithful Wounds, which a Friend will inflict, without betraying the Person admonished to publick Contempt: and, believe me, it is a great and noble thing to cover the Blemishes, and excuse the Failings of others; to draw a Curtain before their Errors, and to display their Perfections; to bury their Weakness in Silence, and to proclaim their Virtues upon the House-top. (*)

to the quick, to be rebuked before those whom he desires should think honourably of him: for, in all the Affairs of the World, so much Reputation is really so much Power. To chide or flatter such publickly is the readiest Way to make them do ill privately.

(*) *Ex defendendo, quam ex accusando, uberior Gloria comparatur.*

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLIII.

On the same Subject.

Rules for it, continued; with Motives to it.

Heb. iii. 13. "Exhort one another daily while it is "called, To-day, lest any of you be hardened "through the Deceitfulness of Sin."

The Neglect of the Duty here before us is one great Cause why many persevere in their Sins without knowing they are Sinners; and that Others feel little or no Remorse in the Pursuit of known and wilful Impiety.

Discourses, therefore, which treat of particular Sins, and take to Task the great and common Disorders of Mankind; which represent their Faults to them in such a Manner as to convince them of the Evil and Danger of them, and put them upon the Endeavour of a Cure, must be more effectual to their Reformation, than general Persuasives, which People seldom apply to themselves, and are, but too often, above the common Apprehension. (*) We

(*) Such Books as teach Sapience and Prudence, and serve to eradicate

We ſhould therefore, in all our Exhortations with Sinners, ſpeak ſo cloſely to their Vices, as may convince them of the Folly, the Sinfulneſs, and Danger of their Proceedings, and produce Amendment in them.

With this View, and to enable us the better to this good Purpoſe, we have already treated on theſe Words, and ſhewn under them, how far, and in what Caſes we are allowed, and it is incumbent on us, to reprove Sinners PARTICULARLY for their Faults, & alſo laid down ſome general Rules for the better Performance of it.

But, beſides what has been already ſaid, there is yet another and more effectual Way of reproving Sinners, and that is, by good Example, (*) which is of an unſpeakable Benefit to Mankind, and has a ſecret Power and Influence upon thoſe with whom we converſe, to form them into the ſame Diſpoſition and Manners with our-

dicate Errors and Vices, are the moſt profitable Writings in the World, and ought to be valued and ſtudied more than all others.

(*) Praiſe ſavours of Flattery, and Cenſure of Malice, be they never ſo juſt. The beſt Way to advance another's Virtue, is to follow it; and the true Means to cry down another's Vice is to decline it. — There is a happy Contagion in Goodneſs; we may perhaps be kindled like green Wood by the neighbouring Flame. The Example of another's Zeal may awaken our's. Thoſe Showers of Benediction which the Prayers of good Men bring down, are ſo plentiful, that ſome Drops at leaſt may fall upon thoſe about them.

Serm. CCCXLIII.

ourſelves; and without which all our other Advice will be ineffectual; for This is a living Rule which teaches Men without Trouble, and lets them ſee their Faults without open Reproof or Upbraiding. Beſides,

As the Generality of Men are more governed by Example, than by Precept, or the intrinſick Reaſon of Things, we muſt acknowledge, it adds great Weight to the Advice, and Force and Energy to the Inſtructions we hear from any Perſon, when they come recommended by his own Practice; when we ſee he adviſes nothing but what he does, nor exacts any thing from others, from which he himſelf deſires to be excuſed.

As, on the contrary, nothing is more cold and inſignificant than good Advice from a bad Man, one that does not obey his own Precepts, nor follow the Advice which he is ſo forward to give. (*)

We ſhould therefore mend our own Manners, before we attempt to reform the Conduct of others, and not condemn them for what we do ourſelves.

Our Saviour is expreſs in the Caſe, "Thou Hypocrite,

(*) A good Cauſe may ſuffer much when it is pleaded by an improper and exceptionable Advocate. How unbecoming is it to hear a Coward harangue on Valour; a Miſer on Contempt of the World; and a notorious Sinner on "the Beauty of Holineſs?"

This commending thoſe good Qualities, he has neither the Honeſty nor Courage to be Maſter of, is, in Effect, only a Satire upon himſelf, and ſerves to make him more ridiculous.

pocrite, firſt caſt out the Beam out of thine own Eye; and then ſhalt thou ſee clearly to pull out the Mote out of thy Brother's Eye." And the Apoſtle, to the ſame Purpoſe, – "Thou that teacheſt another, teacheſt thou not thyſelf?" and again, "Thou who condemneſt another, condemneſt not thou thyſelf, who doeſt the ſame things?"

If therefore our good Counſels are not confirmed by a conformable Practice, they will be as barren Sand, which can bring forth no Fruit, much leſs unto Perfection.

Let us therefore, if we mean to profit by our Advice, be at all Times careful to ſhew-forth a conformable Practice in all Virtue and Godlineſs of Living.

Upon the Whole, – The Occaſions of our Reproof ſhould be weighty and important; and we ſhould take care that it be free from Paſſion or Self-intereſt, leſt any Motive appear, beſides That of doing good.

It ſhould be expreſſed in the moſt decent and ſofteſt Language, and timed, when favourable Circumſtances may concur to make it effectual. We ought to be entirely free ourſelves from the Fault we reprehend in others; or at leaſt, at the ſame Time we are ſo doing, we ought to condemn ourſelves, that by expoſing our own Follies, we may, with the better Grace, rectify thoſe of others; we ought to mix due Praiſes with our

Reproofs, that the Roughneſs of the one may be abated by the Emulation that is raiſed by the other; and laſtly, to mollifie and heal the Wound we have made, by applying the beſt Comfort and Advice we are able.

And becauſe Converſion from an evil Courſe is out of the Reach of human Power, conſidered ſingly, and without the Concurrence of the Divine Grace, we are therefore bound, in Mercy, to theſe our Admonitions, to add our hearty Prayers to the God of all Grace and Compaſſion, that He would commiſerate their wretched State, and, with the out-ſtretched Arm of his Grace, touch their dead Souls, and raiſe them up to Newneſs of Life. For tho, in all Caſes of Miſery, Prayer be a proper Act of Mercy; yet there is none which doth ſo much need and call for our Prayers, as This; for in all other Caſes, it is either in the Power of the Miſerable to help themſelves, or of the Merciful to help and relieve them, or elſe their Miſeries are ſuch, as will ſoon expire. But, as for the Miſeries of the obſtinate Sinner, they are ſuch as God alone can remedy, and ſuch, as, if not remedied, will at laſt terminate in endleſs and unſpeakable Miſery. But,

If the Offender be under our Care & Government, we are obliged to add Corrections to the former Inſtances of Mercy, if Neceſſity requires. For, when

ſuch

ſuch reject our Admonitions, it is a cruel Softneſs and Indulgence not to chaſtiſe them; (*) it is far better to ſnatch them away from imminent Danger, though with Smart and Violence, than to ſtand ſtill, and ſee them periſh. This is evident from the Caſe of Eli.

The Sons of this too eaſy and indulgent Father, had by their looſe and profligate Conduct, given a great and public Offence both to God and Religion; and that too, in an Inſtance which more peculiarly affected his ſacred Character.

One would have thought that Eli, upon ſuch an high and notorious Provocation, ſhould have at once exerted both the Father and the Magiſtrate, and "ſmote the Offenders," and not have contented himſelf with ſuch a ſoft and eaſy Expoſtulation as diſcovered that he was leſs concerned about the Offence his Sons had given, than cautious of offending them: and therefore, he is expreſsly charged with "honouring his Sons above God;" and the Contempt they had done to the Worſhip of God is, conſequently, threatened to be viſited upon him, and his Poſterity, as his own proper Act.

"I have told him, (ſaith God) that I will judge his Houſe for the Iniquity which he knoweth, becauſe his Sons made themſelves vile, and he reſtrained them not."

What

(*) Correction ought never to be given in Anger, for a Man in Paſſion will never obſerve the Mean between the two Extremes of too much and too little. Serm. CCCXLIII.

What remains, further, under this Subject, is to subjoin ſuch Conſiderations as may reaſonably excite us to the due Practice of the Duty before us. And,

Firſt, Let us conſider the ineſtimable Worth of thoſe Souls upon which this Duty of Exhortation is to be employed. (*)

They are of a precious and noble Conſtitution; their Faculties are made to reliſh heavenly and angelic Delights; to feaſt upon thoſe Joys with which God entertains himſelf, and his noble Choir of Angels: and, as they are for much greater Pleaſures and Enjoyments than the Bodies which incloſe them, ſo they are alſo made for an infinitely longer Duration; and when their Bodies are mouldered into Duſt, muſt be partaking of endleſs Happineſs or Miſery.

This Conſideration, as it ſhews the Unmercifulneſs and Height of Injuſtice in thoſe who entice others to Sin, ſo doth it alſo our indiſpenſible Duty to encourage to Virtue and all Goodneſs, by which alone their everlaſting Lot is to be determined.

Can we think ourſelves obliged in Mercy to feed and

(*) The Soul of Man (when "pure from the Corruption that is in the World") is eſteemed by God as a Jewel ineſtimable, as his peculiar and valuable Treaſure; of ſo high a Price in his Sight, that it drew-down even the Son of God himſelf from Heaven on Purpoſe to redeem it: of how much more Value, then, muſt it be to Man, whoſe it is, and whom it ſo nearly concerns?

and cloath the Bodies of Men, and yet be altogether unconcerned what becomes of their ever-precious, never-dying Souls? (*)

Is it poſſible, that we ſhould be ſo ſolicitous as we are for the temporal Welfare of thoſe about us, and yet, in the mean while, neglect that eternal Being within them, which muſt be ſubject to everlaſting Happineſs or Miſery?

Should we not call her a barbarous Mother, and a Monſter of the human Race, who denies Meat to a ſtarving Child, or expoſes it naked to the knipping Froſt?

The Caſe is juſt the ſame with ſuch as neglect to inſtruct thoſe about them in Religion and religious Duties; thereby denying them the Food and Raiment of their Souls, without which they muſt periſh forever.

"To reprove, to rebuke, and exhort, with much Long-ſuffering & Forbearance," is certainly the nobleſt Inſtance of Charity we can do to our Neighbour, as it tends to promote the true and ſupreme Intereſt of Man, the Happineſs of his Soul to all Eternity.

Many excellent things are ſpoken of this Duty, as it reſpects the temporal Advantage of other Men, and diſpoſes us to procure for them the Comforts and Conveniencies of a Life which is of a very uncertain, and at beſt of a very ſhort Continuance. And yet, our

(*) "The eternal Salvation of *One* Soul," ſays an ingenious and pious Writer [Dr. Doddridge] "is of greater Importance, and big with greater Events, than the *temporal* Salvation of a *whole* Kingdom, though it were for the Space of ten thouſand Ages; becauſe there will come up a Point, an Inſtant in Eternity, when that *One* Soul ſhall have exiſted as many Ages as all the Individuals of a *whole* Kingdom, ranged in cloſe Succeſſion, will in the whole have

exiſted

What remains, further, under this Subject, is to subjoin such Considerations as may reasonably excite us to the due Practice of the Duty before us. And,

First, Let us consider the inestimable Worth of those Souls upon which this Duty of Exhortation is to be employed. (*)

They are of a precious and noble Constitution; their Faculties are made to relish heavenly and angelic Delights; to feast upon those Joys with which God entertains himself, and his noble Choir of Angels: and, as they are for much greater Pleasures and Enjoyments than the Bodies which inclose them, so they are also made for an infinitely longer Duration; and when their Bodies are mouldered into Dust, must be partaking of endless Happiness or Misery.

This Consideration, as it shews the Unmercifulness and Height of Injustice in those who entice others to Sin, so doth it also our indispensible Duty to encourage to Virtue and all Goodness, by which alone their everlasting Lot is to be determined.

Can we think ourselves obliged in Mercy to feed and

(*) The Soul of Man (when "pure from the Corruption that is in the World") is esteemed by God as a Jewel inestimable, as his peculiar and valuable Treasure; of so high a Price in his Sight, that it drew down even the Son of God himself from Heaven on Purpose to redeem it: of how much more Value, then, must it be to Man, whose it is, and whom it so nearly concerns?

and cloath the Bodies of Men, and yet be altogether unconcerned what becomes of their ever-precious, never-dying Souls?

Is it poſſible, that we ſhould be ſo ſolicitous as we are for the temporal Welfare of thoſe about us, and yet, in the mean while, neglect that eternal Being within them, which muſt be ſubject to everlaſting Happineſs or Miſery?

Should we not call her a barbarous Mother, and a Monſter of the human Race, who denies Meat to a ſtarving Child, or expoſes it naked to the knipping Froſt?

The Caſe is juſt the ſame with ſuch as neglect to inſtruct thoſe about them in Religion and religious Duties; thereby denying them the Food and Raiment of their Souls, without which they muſt periſh forever.

"To reprove, to rebuke, and exhort, with much Long-ſuffering & Forbearance," is certainly the nobleſt Inſtance of Charity we can do to our Neighbour, as it tends to promote the true and ſupreme Intereſt of Man, the Happineſs of his Soul to all Eternity.

Many excellent things are ſpoken of this Duty, as it reſpects the temporal Advantage of other Men, and

exiſted in ten thouſand Ages. 'Therefore *One* Soul is capable of a larger Share of Happineſs or Miſery throughout an endleſs Duration, (for That will be before it ſtill) than an *whole* Kingdom is capable of in ten thouſand Ages." Of what vaſt Importance, then, is the Soul of Man! and how carefully ſhould we provide for it!

charitable Offices in contributing to the Relief of others under Circumſtances of Diſtreſs, have a great many Promiſes made to them, both of the Life that now is, and alſo of that which is to come.

They are ſaid to be "Sacrifices acceptable and well-pleaſing to God;" and, in Conſideration of them, to acknowledge himſelf a Debtor to Men in this World; that They deliver out of many temporal Afflictions, or procure proper Supports and Conſolations under them. But the Son of God goes yet higher, and declares that in the Day when he will judge all Mankind to an unſpeakable State of Happineſs or Miſery, in a World that ſhall never have an End, He will take the Good we have done to our indigent Brethren as tho' done to himſelf, and will reward us accordingly. (*)

The Time would fail me to enumerate all the particular Expreſſions and public Teſtimonies of God's Favour to the truly Charitable. Now,

If the Duties of Charity, with Reſpect to a Society which we form here upon Earth, a Society only, in Compariſon, for a few Moments, which is diſſolved with our Lives, and is chiefly maintained by a Communion of fading and tranſitory Goods—If the Duties of Charity, upon this Conſideration, be ſo binding and indiſpenſible, that they are made the great Teſt of our being the true Diſciples of Chriſt, (‡) and that the Trial

(*) Matt. xxv. 34, &c. (‡) John xiii. 35. of

of our Obedience at the laſt Day, peculiarly proceeds upon them; How much more careful ought we to be in diſcharging all neceſſary Duties, with Regard to that ſpiritual Society we are entered into under Chriſt our Head; which is begun here indeed upon Earth, but will be indiſſoluble and "eternal in the Heavens!" A Society which is deſigned to advance the Perfection of our nobleſt and immortal Part, in the Viſion and Enjoyment of God, in the intimate Communion we ſhall have with the Son of God, with the holy Angels, and with the Spirits of juſt Men made perfect; and in the Fruition of thoſe great and glorious Rewards of Eternity, which we ſhall then enjoy in common and without any Diviſion!

Let us, then, labour in this heavenly and bleſſed Work; a Work that proceedeth from Love, in the more generous and better Part of it; "in bringing many Sons to Righteouſneſs." Let us uſe our beſt Endeavours, and particularly in the Way here recommended, to reclaim Sinners from the evil of their Ways, bringing them to Repentance, that they may be ſaved.

It is to a good Man one of the greateſt Pleaſures of this Life to do good, even in relieving the temporal Wants of the indigent and needy, or to encourage their Endeavours. To a wiſe Man, this is the chief, (I had almoſt ſaid, the only) End, for which, (conſidering the

Temptations of it,) a high Poſt and Fortune in the World ought to be deſired. And now,

If the Pleaſure and Satisfaction of doing-good ariſe, as it muſt be ſuppoſed they ſhould, in Proportion to the Quality and Degree of the Goodneſs we do, what unſpeakable Joy will ſpring up in the Mind of a good Man who has been inſtrumental in bringing a loſt Sheep into the Fold under Jeſus Chriſt, the great Biſhop and Shepherd of the Flock! – or, to uſe Words of the Apoſtle, "in converting a Sinner from the Evil of his Ways, and ſaving a Soul from Death," which would otherwiſe, moſt probably, have periſhed!

"The Gifts of the Underſtanding are the Treaſures of God, and He appoints to every One his Portion, in what Meaſure ſeemeth good unto himſelf.

"Hath He endued thee with Wiſdom, therefore? hath He enlightened thy Mind with the Knowledge of Truth? Communicate it to the ignorant for their Inſtruction; yea, reprove the Wicked, and thou ſhalt ſave thy own Soul."

This is a ſecond Conſideration by which we enforce the Duty before us.

Let us conſider how much we ourſelves are concerned in the State and Welfare of the Souls of others, and how careful we ought to be on that Account. For, in the State of Danger wherein we are placed, God hath com-

committed us to each other's Truſt, with a ſtrict Injunction, that we ſhould "exhort one another daily, leſt any of us be hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin." And if, when it is in our Power to prevent it, we ſuffer our Brother to be irrecoverably loſt, we are, and ſhall be accountable for it at the Tribunal of God, who will one Day ſeverely charge us with this our cruel Unfaithfulneſs to our Brother, in ſuffering him to miſcarry, thro' our Default, without admoniſhing him of his Danger, and endeavouring to reſcue him from it, by our charitable and uſeful Perſuaſions, and by our kind and friendly Aſſiſtance. (*)

He, therefore, that hinders not a Miſchief, when it is in his Power, is himſelf guilty of it. (‡) But if we warn him, and he turns not, the Benefit will ſtill be to us; we have done our Duty, we have ſaved ourſelves, and the Sin will lie at his own Door, upon himſelf only.

Magiſtrates, Parents, and Maſters of Families, and thoſe who have the Cure of Souls, are particularly concerned under this Head; becauſe, the very Nature and Deſign of the Relation they ſtand in to the Sinner, obliges them to be "the Miniſters of God" to him for good,

(*) *Errantem in Viam reducito.*

(‡) Omitting to do good, is committing evil.

Qui tacet, conſentire videtur.

"If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thyſelf; but if thou ſcorneſt, thou alone ſhalt bear it." Serm. CCCXLIII.

good, and to keep him from falling into Sin: and consequently, by the Abuſe of that juſt Authority whereby they might have laid wholeſome and convenient Reſtraints upon him, they are evidently ſo far accountable for the Diſorders he is guilty of.

Thus with Reſpect to SPIRITUAL Paſtors and Teachers, (whoſe Office it is to warn the Wicked from their evil Ways, and to ſave their Souls) God threatens, that if they continue impenitent they ſhall die in their Iniquity; yet, he will notwithſtanding require their Blood at the Hands of thoſe through whoſe Supineneſs or Neglect they periſhed. — Hear the Words from the Mouth of God himſelf! (*)

"Son of Man, I have made thee a Watchman unto "the Houſe of Iſrael: therefore hear the Words at my "Mouth, and give them Warning from me.

"When I ſay unto the Wicked, Thou ſhalt ſurely "die; and thou giveſt him not Warning, nor ſpeakeſt "to warn the Wicked from his evil Way, to ſave his "Life; the ſame wicked Man ſhall die in his Iniquity; "but his Blood will I require at thine Hand.

"Yet if thou warn the Wicked, and he turn not "from his Wickedneſs, nor from his wicked Way; he "ſhall die in his Iniquity, but thou haſt delivered thy "Soul." — What a Charge This to the Watchmen of Iſrael! Haſt thou Knowledge, and perceiveſt thou

(*) Ezekiel iii. 17—19.

not

not this? Yea, Haſt thou Knowledge, and art yet ſilent? "Cry aloud, ſpare not, lift up thy Voice like a Trumpet, and ſhew my People their Tranſgreſſions, and the Houſe of Jacob their Sins."

It is probable, in Alluſion to this, it is, that St. Paul profeſſes himſelf "pure from the Blood of all Men," in that he had ſtrictly and faithfully diſcharged his Paſtoral Duty, and not omitted to declare, as there was Occaſion, "the whole Will, and all the Counſel of God."

With Reſpect to the PATERNAL Office, we have a memorable Example, in old Eli, of the Guilt which Parents contract by a criminal Indulgence of their Children, or neglecting to interpoſe their Authority, in Order to reclaim them from their evil Courſes. (*)

With Reſpect to Maſters and Others, common Humanity will oblige them to be concerned for the Happineſs of the more diſtant Parts of their Families, whether they be Subjects, or Servants, (over whom they have the Charge,) as they are Men of the ſame Nature with themſelves: and Charity likewiſe, (as they are Chriſtians, and capable of the common Salvation) doth yet more ſtrictly oblidge them by all Means to endeavour that they may be made Partakers of it; eſpecially as they are committed to their Care, and muſt therefore expect to be accountable to God for them.

God,

(*) See Page 143. Serm. CCCXLIII.

God, in Juſtice, expects every One to do the good, which he hath given him the Abilities to do; — the conferring which is the higheſt Honour God can beſtow on his Creatures; and uſing them rightly, is the nobleſt Way of, at once, obeying and reſembling our Creator. — Beſides,

Our Domeſticks contribute greatly to our Happineſs; ſhould we not therefore (ſince we ſo eaſily may) contribute all we can, in this important Point, to their's alſo? — But indeed, Is not our own Welfare, preſent as well as future, deeply concerned in it?

Our Eaſe, our Characters, our Fortunes, our Lives, all depend on the Honeſty, the Veracity, Sobriety, and Diligence of thoſe about us: — And! what can ſecure theſe Qualities in them ſo well, as our teaching and proving to them that God requires them at their Hands, and will treat them as they treat us?

Thus, in whatever State or Capacity we are, which puts us under a ſpecial Obligation of preventing or reclaiming Sinners, and gives our Advice or Reproof a proper Force; in Caſe of our Neglect, the Reaſon of our being reſponſible for their Crimes is the ſame: tho' we do indeed contract a higher Degree of Guilt, in Proportion to the greater Authority we have over them.

It concerns us, therefore, in an eſpecial Manner, for our own Sakes, (ſo far as we have Opportunity,) to dif-

discharge all Offices of Mercy towards the Souls of Men, left, whilſt they periſh through our Neglect, we ſhould be involved in their Ruin. And,

To encourage us hereto, we are aſſured, that, as we are to ſuffer with thoſe who periſh thro' our Neglect; ſo, if by our Inſtructions, by our ſeaſonable Rebukes, or Admonitions, we "ſave a Soul alive," which would otherwiſe have periſhed, doubtleſs, we ſhall in no wiſe loſe our Reward. For,

If "a Cup of cold Water," given to a thirſty Brother, ſhall entitle to a Kingdom, of how much more acceptable a Service (ſuppoſe ye) muſt it be to God, when, by a merciful Diſtribution of the Bread of Life, we deliver Souls from everlaſting Torments!

Accordingly St. Paul declares, that "if any One errs from the Truth, and One convert him, he ſhall ſave a Soul from Death, and ſhall hide a Multitude of Sins." And the Prophet, "He that converteth Souls to Righteouſneſs, ſhall ſhine as the Stars forevermore."

To the Conſiderations already laid down, let us add, laſtly, What cannot but be of great Force & Moment hereto, [viz] the Nobleneſs of the Undertaking. For hereby we take a Part with God and his holy Angels, and act as valiant Soldiers under the great Captain of our Salvation, and, with Him, become as Saviours to the Souls of Men. There

There is no Vaſſalage ſo ignoble, nor Servitude ſo miſerable, as that of Vice. Mines and Gallies, Mills and Dungeons, are Words of Eaſe to the Service and Wages of Sin, whoſe Progreſs is ſhameful, and its End Death: and therefore, the bringing Sinners to Repentance is the greateſt of all Charities to Men, ſo noble, ſo temptingly Deſign, that it drew even God himſelf from Heaven on Purpoſe to redeem us.

I ſhall add now a few Reflections, as Cautions upon the Whole. And,

Firſt, If this be a Duty of ſo great Nicety, and requires ſo many Talents to render it effectual and ſubſervient to the great Ends of promoting Piety, we ought not raſhly and unadviſedly to take it upon us; but to conſider well with ourſelves whether we be in any good Meaſure qualified for it. For,

It is not a heady and popular Cry after Reformation, which will render Men thus qualified; but a competent Stock of Knowledge of human Nature, as well as Piety and good Senſe, is required for it.

Zeal for promoting the Intereſts of Religion is truly commendable; but yet, if it be not kept under proper Reſtrictions, nothing expoſes the Honour of it more.

To theſe Qualifications, reſpecting ourſelves, we muſt add others alſo on the Qualifications of thoſe who are to be reproved. And, Among

Among the ſeveral Means, which God in his Wiſdom hath appointed for the Reformation of Sinners, Fraternal-Reproof (we have ſeen) is one, which, in the natural Tendency of the thing, and in the Judgment and Experience of Men, is found very proper to this End; and Charity (we ſee) obliges us to the Exerciſe of it. But yet, we would not be underſtood, as if we were obliged to the Exerciſe of it at all Adventures, (*) or indeed on any Occaſion, but where it may be performed after a proper and becoming Manner. For, it being a Duty of Prudence, and deriving its Obligation from the Propriety it has to effect the End propoſed, where the End, in all Probability, cannot be obtained, the Obligation ceaſes.

And therefore Solomon has expreſsly determined, that where there is no Likelihood that our Reproofs will make any good Impreſſion, but rather, perhaps, be to our Diſadvantage, without any Benefit to the Party reproved, there we are to forbear them. (‡)

"Reprove not a Scorner, (ſays he) leſt he *hate thee*;" and, "He that reproves a Scorner, getteth to himſelf a Blot." — But, the Reaſon of both theſe Prohibitions hold with Reſpect to all other Perſons, as well as to Scorners, where no probable good is to be expected from

(*) See Page 115. (‡) See Page 124, 125.

from our Reproofs; but rather ſome Conſequences injurious to ourſelves, or to the Honour of God. But,

2dly, It being a Duty of ſo great Neceſſity withal, thoſe who find themſelves really qualified for it, and where there is alſo a Proſpect of doing-good by their Reproofs, there they ought not to be reſtrained from a known Duty, that is indiſpenſible, upon any worldly Motives whatever, nor be diſcouraged from performing it, tho' it ſometimes expoſes them to Inconveniencies, or incurs the Odium of thoſe with whom they take ſo unacceptable a Freedom.

Let us, therefore, reſolve to diſcharge a good Conſcience, and leave the Conſequences of doing our Duty to the Diſpoſal of God.

This was the Method which the holy Apoſtles took, and which gave them that Peace and Satisfaction of Mind, which the World cannot give, and is ſtill the leſs capable of pretending to give the more we comply with, and proſtitute our Conſciences to the corrupt Arts and Maxims of it.

Our Bleſſed Lord himſelf complains, that "the World hated him, becauſe He teſtified of it, that the Works thereof were evil." Let us follow his glorious Example in the ſame excellent Deſign, where we have a juſt Call and Occaſion to exert ourſelves in it.

"The

"The Diſciple is not above his Maſter, nor the Servant above his Lord:" but this one Conſideration is ſufficient to raiſe us above every thing in this World, that, "if we ſuffer with Chriſt," in a conſtant & ſincere Obedience to the Commands of God, "we ſhall be glorified with him."

May we therefore "be ſteadfaſt and unmoveable, and always abounding in this Work of the Lord, foraſmuch as we know that our Labour will not be in vain, in the Lord." For,

The Time will come when it will be made manifeſt, in the Sight of Angels and Men, how high a Value our gracious Maſter ſets on thoſe Acts of Mercy done to the Souls of his Servants; when the good we have done them ſhall be both favourable to them, and return an hundred Fold into our own Boſom, and will entitle us to thoſe Joys, "which Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man to be conceived; Enter ye into the Joy of your Lord."

Above all, Let the Reprobate (on whom our kind Admonitions may at any Time be employed) be careful to turn and amend at our Reproof; for, otherwiſe, he will increaſe his Guilt by a two-fold Degree: firſt, in the Offence itſelf; and 2dly, in reſiſting the Advice

given.—Wherefore, "Turn ye, at my Reproof;—turn, and your Soul shall live." (*)

(*) To retract and mend a Fault at the Admonition of a Friend, hurts our Credit and Liberty no more, than if we had grown wiser upon our own Thought: for, it is still our own Judgment & Temper, which makes us see our Mistake, and willing to retrieve it.

Cujusvis Hominis est errare; nullius, nisi Insipientis, in Errore perseverare. Fas est et ab Hoste doceri. — A sincere Confession of our Ignorance, is one of the fairest and surest Testimonies of our Judgement. It is a Sign of great Prudence to be willing to receive Instruction; and the most Intelligent, sometimes, stand in need of it.

"He that is wise, will not grudge when he is reformed."

"Observe the Opportunity, then, and beware of Evil, and be not ashamed when it concerneth thy Soul: for there is a Shame that bringeth Sin, and there is a Shame which is Glory and Grace."

("Be not ashamed to confess thy Sins, and force not the Course of the River." Learn to unlearn what you have learned amiss.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLIV.

The Wisdom of regarding Counsel, and the Folly of rejecting it.

Prov. xii. 15. "The Way of a Fool is right in his "own Eyes; but he that hearkeneth unto Coun- "sel is wise."

However such a Confession may expose us to the severe Imputation of the Text; it must be owned, for it cannot be disowned, that the Generality of Mankind are very partial to their own Schemes, and immoderately addicted to their own Ways of thinking and acting.

However their Judgments be formed, whether deliberately, or rashly; however their Measures be concerted, whether wisely, or weakly; they resolutely adhere to them, and persist in them at all Adventures.

Every Man's Way is, and must be, in some Degree, acceptable to himself; otherwise he would never have chosen it. But, nevertheless, whoever is wise, will be apt to suspect and be diffident of himself; and, upon that Account, be willing to "hearken unto Counsel."

Whereas

Whereas the fooliſh Man being, in Proportion to his Folly, full of himſelf, and ſwallowed up in Conceit, will ſeldom take any Counſel but his own; and for that very Reaſon, becauſe it is his own.

Hence it often happens, that in Oppoſition to all the Reaſons and Remonſtrances that can be offered him, he continues immoveable in his Choice, and thereby expoſes himſelf to many Inconveniencies that might eaſily have been avoided.

Thus his Intereſt falls a Sacrifice to his Vanity, and he never gains Wiſdom till he has dearly paid for it. Nothing will convince him that he needs other Men's Counſel, till he finds himſelf bewildered in his own Embarraſſment. — In treating on this Subject, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider it in general; And then,

Secondly, With a particular Regard to our main Concern.

Conſidering it in general, – The Folly of rejecting Counſel, and the Wiſdom of harkening to it, may evidently be made appear on the following Grounds.

1ſt. The Mind of Man is not only finite and limited, but of a ſhort Extent and a narrow Comprehenſion. When he hath improved it as much as he can, (which is ſeldom the Caſe,) ſtill his Views will be very imperfect, and his Knowledge inconſiderable. When he hath ſought and ſearched as far as he is able, innumerable

merable things will eſcape him; and he is ſure to find himſelf frequently at a Loſs.

Should we ſuppoſe all human Knowledge put together; compartively ſpeaking, it would amount to very little. Like a great Number of Rivulets united in one Stream, it would bear no Proportion to the vaſt and boundleſs Ocean of Truth.

How ſmall a Pittance, then, muſt That be, which falls, or can fall, to any particular Perſon's Share?

Whatever Pains he has taken, whatever Inquiries he has made, in numberleſs Caſes and Reſpects he will find himſelf in the Dark; very often puzzled and perplexed, and wanting Help on almoſt every Occaſion. Like a Traveller in a ſtrange Road, he muſt either take Directions, or frequently loſe his Way, and wander he knows not where.

Nothing is more abſurd than to imagine that any Man can be too wiſe to learn, or too knowing to need Inſtruction. Nay, whoever entertains ſuch a Thought in Reſpect of himſelf, does thereby demonſtrate his own Folly, and prove himſelf egregiouſly ignorant. And this holds equally true in Point of Speculation, and Matters of Practice.

As every Man wants a Communication of Light for the Improvement of his Conceptions, ſo he no leſs needs Counſel for the Direction of his Actions.

Various Caſes are continually occurring, many Exigencies he muſt meet-with in Life, wherein he muſt either take Advice, or be a great Sufferer.

Nor is it any Objection againſt the Wiſdom of Providence, that Men are not always able to direct themſelves in the Execution of theſe Affairs, and the Diſcharge of thoſe Duties which are incumbent on them. On the contrary, it was moſt wiſely ordained, that in this, and many other Inſtances, they ſhould mutually depend on each other's Aſſiſtance.

As they were intended for Society, ſuch a Dependance was requiſite to bind and cement it; to join their Heads and Hearts, and enable them more ſucceſsfully to promote the great Ends of Life. But to return:

Since all Men's Minds are thus defective, and their Knowledge ſhort and limited; ſince, on many Occaſions, they are unable to direct themſelves, or remove thoſe Difficulties in which they are often engaged; it is manifeſtly great Folly to put entire Confidence in their own Judgments, and lean ſolely "on their own Underſtandings."

On the other Hand, To "hearken unto Counſel," is a Diſparagement to no Man: ſo far from it, that it is an Indication of Wiſdom, and the likelieſt Way to increaſe it. It is a natural Remedy, and a proper Supply, for human Imperfection; a ſafe and profitable Expedient;

pedient; and the wiſeſt Men are ever moſt willing to make uſe of it. — But,

2dly, The Reaſonableneſs of regarding Counſel, and the Folly of deſpiſing it, will more evidently appear, if we conſider the Diverſity of Men's Talents and Opportunities.

Let us ſuppoſe a Man ſo far indulging his Vanity, as to conclude himſelf poſſeſſed of as much Knowledge, and as large Abilities, as any Perſon whatever; and, (to ſhorten the Diſpute,) let this vain Concluſion, this high Demand, be granted him: ſtill it will be nothing to the Purpoſe; nor will it juſtify That Self-confidence and Neglect of Counſel, which are condemned in the Text.

In ſome Points, in ſome Parts of Knowledge, he would nevertheleſs be excelled; admitting, in the Main, that Equality of Underſtanding which he pretends to. For whatever Men's Capacities may be, moſt certain it is, that there is a great Difference and Variety among them; we mean not in Degree, but in Kind. Their Talents, even when equally valuable and good, yet point different Ways, and are ſuited to different Objects and Employments. One Man's natural Genius lies one Way, and another's another. And ſuppoſing them followed and cultivated alike, the Conſequence muſt be, that each of them muſt excel and be ſuperior to the other in That Branch of Skill for which Nature has fitted him. (Serm. 344.) What

What we read of ſupernatural Gifts, the ſame holds true of natural Powers; that "they are divided to every Man ſeverally" as the Donor pleaſes; and that purpoſely, without Queſtion, to anſwer better the various Uſes and Occaſions of Life. Suppoſing, then, any Man's Capacity as good, in its Kind, as he imagines it; yet ſurely he muſt allow that other Men may have equal Talents and Abilities of other Kinds. From whence it follows, that if not in ALL, yet in MANY Caſes, they muſt be able to judge better, and give better Directions than he can pretend to.

No Man had ever ſuch an univerſal Genius as to excel in EVERY thing. And if any One can arrive at ſuch an extravagant Degree of Vanity, as to fancy ſuch a thing of himſelf, all that can be concluded from it, is, that, however he may flatter himſelf, he wants Counſel more than any Man living. — But further,

As Men's Talents are various, ſo their Opportunities of Improvement and Experience are very different; not only ſuch Opportunities as ariſe from Men's reſpective Profeſſions, wherein they are doubtleſs moſt capable of judging, and moſt fit to be conſulted; but ſuch as they accidentally meet with in the ſeveral Paths and Purſuits of Life.

Every Man of Thought and Application muſt gain Experience in thoſe Matters wherein he has been converſant;

verſant; and the more Experience he has, the fitter he muſt ordinarily be to direct thoſe that want it; — and want it every Man muſt in many things.

As no Man has an univerſal Underſtanding, ſo no Man has, or can have, univerſal Experience. Both the One and the Other are unavoidably limited to a few Particulars. The Narrowneſs of our Minds, and the Shortneſs of our Lives, will ſeldom admit of any thing further.

As then almoſt every Man may be capable of giving Advice in ſome Points or other; ſo there is no Man who is not often obliged to receive it, or to ſuffer through the Want of it.

Hence it not unfrequently comes to paſs, that even the loweſt Part of Mankind have been qualified to inform the Higheſt; that in ſome Caſes Philoſophers have been inſtructed by illiterate Ruſtics, and even Princes by Peaſants. (*) Nor have the greateſt Men, on proper Occaſions, diſdained to hear and follow the Advice of the leaſt. And indeed it is an Argument of true Greatneſs of Mind, as well as good Senſe and Judgment, ſo to do. For moſt certain it is, that the Knowledge of the wiſeſt Men may be, and is often indebted to the Experience of thoſe who know the leaſt. And if any Man is ſo vain or weak as to ſlight the Judgment,

(*) See Note (*), Page 286. Serm. CCCXLIV.

Judgment, and contemn the Counſel of other Men; if no "Way is right in his Eyes but his own;" he may enjoy his own Eſteem and good Opinion as he can; but the wiſer Part of Mankind will not fail to brand him as Solomon does in the Text. — Again,

3dly, The Wiſdom of hearkening unto Counſel, and the Folly of deſpiſing it, are further manifeſt from the following Conſideration: [viz] Let Men's Abilities be never ſo great, and their Knowledge never ſo extenſive, ſtill they ought not, and without great Danger and Inconvenience cannot truſt wholly and entirely to themſelves. For Thoſe Abilities and That Knowledge eaſily may be, and often are, rendered uſeleſs by the Prejudices and Prepoſſeſſions of Men's own Minds. The beſt Underſtandings are frequently biaſſed, not to ſay blinded, by favourite Opinions, and partial Inclinations.

Nothing is more common than for Men's Appetites and Affections to bribe their Judgments, and ſeduce them into erroneous and abſurd Ways of thinking and acting. They are often entangled and ſet faſt, not through the Want of Light and Knowledge, not through any Defect of their Heads, but through the Deceitfulneſs of their Hearts.

In many Caſes where they could direct other Men, (*) they themſelves want Counſel; and are driven into the

(*) See Note (*), Page 125.

Snare

Snare by Strength of Inclination, or the Force of Habit. The plaineſt Points are often unperceived in the Deciſion; the weakeſt Deſigns undertaken, and the abſurdeſt Actions done, by Men of ſuperior Underſtanding and diſtinguiſhed Capacity.

If it be inquired how this comes to paſs, the Anſwer is, that their Judgments are clouded by ſome ſtrong Prejudice, or corrupted by ſome powerful Affection; inſomuch that they can neither hear nor ſee any thing but what makes for One Side of the Queſtion. And though the Evidence on the other Side be much ſtronger, and would appear ſo to them if they were unprejudiced; yet, ſome Way or other, it is effectually ſtifled, and ſtands for nothing.

In ſuch a Caſe as this what avail any Man's Abilities? What ſignifies his Capacity, while he thus plays the Fool with his Faculties, and will not uſe them fairly and honeſtly? Is it not plain that he wants Counſel and Admonition as much as if he were never ſo ignorant? And indeed he really is, on ſuch Occaſions, as ignorant as a Man can be; only with this Difference, that his Ignorance is not involuntary, but in a great Meaſure wilful; not his Misfortune, but his Crime: and is the leſs likely to be cured; two Evils being here to be removed: firſt, the unſetling of his former Prejudices, and then the ſetting his miſtaken Notions right;

neither of which being ever effected but with great Difficulty, Succeſs in this Caſe is the leſs likely, and moſt probably ſuch a One will be ſet-faſt in his Miſtakes forever. (*)

Let Men's Eyes or Underſtandings be ever ſo good, it is at any Time in their Power to make both uſeleſs by ſhutting them up againſt the Light.

While a Man is reſolved not to ſee, he muſt and will be as much in the dark as thoſe that want the Light.

But this acquired Darkneſs, this voluntary Incapacity, as well as the Want of Counſel thereby occaſioned, no where appear more frequently, or more remarkably, than in the Tranſaction of our ſpiritual Concerns.

(*) It is obſervable of every Kind of wrong Prejudice, that in Proportion to its Strength, it fetters the Mind, and renders it incapable of viewing things as they really are; ſo that whatever Evidence may be offered againſt ſtrong Prepoſſeſſions, it appears as no Evidence at all; the Underſtanding, as to ſuch Points, being without its proper and uſual Diſcernment.

It happens in ſome Caſes to the Soul, as it doth to the Body; in which ſtrong rooted Habits prevail ſo far, as to lay Men under a Sort of Neceſſity in their Actions: they are determined even without, and, as it were, againſt their Wills: nor is it poſſible to deſtroy ſuch Habits, but by great Diligence, and ſlow Degrees.

So likewiſe, in Reference to the Mind; where Men have been long uſed to treat certain Points as indiſputable, they are ſhocked at their being brought into Debate; and ſo far from deſiring to be better informed, that they avoid it with a Kind of religious Horror. See Prov. xxvi. 12; and the firſt Letter in No. 432 of the Spectator.

cerns, and what relates to the Diſcharge of our Duty: which is,

Secondly, The Second Point that I propoſed to conſider.

Here, then, the Power of Prejudice, and the Bias of Inclination, ſhew themſelves in the higheſt Degree. Though we want no Knowledge, though our Underſtandings be never ſo well informed, we can find Ways and Means to render it ineffectual. We can, and too often do, withſtand the cleareſt Evidence, and ſhut our Eyes againſt the plaineſt Reaſons in the World. And if our Ears be ſhut too; if we will not hearken to Counſel, nor ſuffer ourſelves to be adviſed; it is eaſy to ſee what is like to be the Conſequence.

Whenever we ſeriouſly reflect on it, we cannot but be aſtoniſhed to think what Pains Men take, and what Arts they uſe, to delude themſelves and impoſe upon their own Judgments; and that in Affairs of the utmoſt Conſequence. "The Way of a Man, (ſays our royal Author,) is right in his own Eyes, though the End thereof be the Ways of Death."

When we have wandered out of the Road, and almoſt loſt ourſelves in Error, we can make ourſelves believe that we have continued all the while in the High-way to Truth and Happineſs. So ſtrong is this Self-deluſion, that it hides from us whatever we have

no Mind to see; and, in the midst of Guilt and Danger, sooths us into an Opinion of Innocence and Security. Very often we lay aside all Thoughts of our Duty, and keep it quite out of our Minds; and when we do think of it, we make a Shift to think just what we have a Mind. In Respect of what is past, we place our Conduct in the best Light, and represent our Actions in the fairest Colours. Our Judgments are always favourable, and sometimes directly false; and as much as possible we teach our very Consciences to flatter. We speak Peace to ourselves, when there is no Peace; and conclude ourselves in Safety, when we are on the very Brink of Ruin. – In Respect of Futurity, whatever may be dreadful or disagreeable, is carefully covered, and kept out of Sight.

On the contrary, we build fair Hopes, and raise fine Prospects, in our own Imaginations; and what is wanting in Truth and Probability, is made up with Fallacy and Fiction. In short,

Such is the Deceitfulness of Sin, and so weakly are we guarded against its Frauds, that nothing can be more foolish, nothing more fatal, than trusting wholly to ourselves, and rejecting the Benefit of wise Counsel and faithful Admonition.

If we refused other Men's Advice merely in Order to follow the Dictates of our Reason; tho' this, in many

ny Cafes, would ſtill be Folly, yet it would be moderate Folly in Compariſon of what we are often guilty of. We not only neglect other Men's Underſtandings, but frequently our own. Inſtead of liſtening to our Reaſon, as we pretend, we are many Times only conſulting our Inclinations, and taking Counſel of our Luſts, our Appetites, and Deſires. And, doubtleſs, miſerable Counſellors they are.

What ſhould we think of that Man, who, renouncing the Protection of Law and Government, ſhould commit himſelf to be directed by wild Creatures, and Beaſts of Prey? Such, and more fooliſh, is his Conduct, who, abandoning his Reaſon, gives himſelf up to the Guidance of his Luſts and Paſſions. For, in Truth, the Paſſions of Men, when they have once broken-looſe from the Reſtraints of Reaſon and Religion, and have gotten their full Liberty, are more unruly and miſchievous than any brutal Inſtincts whatever: ſo great need have we of the Direction of our Reaſon and Underſtanding: and indeed, of all the Reaſon we can meet-with, either in ourſelves, or from others.

We ſhould carefully "incline our Ear unto Wiſdom," wherever it is to be found. We ſhould "ſeek her as Silver," (according to our wiſe Author's Advice,) "and ſearch for her, as for hid Treaſures." For "She is a Tree of Life to them that lay-hold upon her,

and happy is every One that retaineth her. Then ſhall he walk in his Way ſafely, and his Foot ſhall not ſtumble." — But,

It is further to be obſerved, that as Men's Attachment to their own Ways, and their Averſion to Counſel, are frequently owing to the Prejudices and Partialites of Self-love, or the Deluſions of ſinful Luſts; ſo they are often occaſioned by Thoughtleſſneſs, Negligence, and Inconſideration.

However apt they may be to miſtake or miſrepreſent their Duty, moſt certain it is that they are ſtill more prone to forget it, as well as thoſe important Truths that are connected with it. Though they very well know what Obligations they are under, and ſufficiently underſtand where their true Intereſt lies; yet while theſe things are unconſidered and unthought of, it is much the ſame as if they were unknown.

If Men will not take care to keep them in Mind, but rather endeavour to remove them, how can it be expected that they ſhould have any Influence upon them?

Suppoſing, therefore, that they did not want Inſtruction and Counſel, yet certainly they ſtand in great need of faithful Monitors, to bring theſe neglected Truths to their Remembrance; to open their eyes, and recal their Thoughts; and, if poſſible, to fix them on thoſe weighty

Con-

Concerns which They are ſo apt and ſo inclinable to forget: – to admoniſh and exhort them daily, leſt they be hardened, or ſtupified, through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin. Such Help as this is univerſally wanted; nor can it without extreme Folly and deſperate Obſtinacy be rejected.

Eſpecially if it be conſidered, how much depends on the Care we take of our Conduct, and the Diſcharge of our Duty. This is Matter not only of a great Moment, but really of infinite Conſequence.

When we fail of Succeſs in our temporal Affairs, at moſt we can only ſuſtain a temporal Damage, which perhaps may be repaired; and if it cannot, yet it may be born with Patience, and even Contentment. For moſt of the things of this World are of ſuch a Nature, that we may either do with them, or without them. And, moreover, this Life itſelf is but a Span, and will ſoon be ended. But if we finally miſcarry in our ſpiritual Concerns, the Loſs is irreparable, unſpeakable, and eternal.

If we forfeit the Favour of God, and that great and endleſs Happineſs which belongs to it; what can there be left to relieve or comfort us? If we loſe that mighty Good, that ineſtimable Bleſſing; all our Hopes are ſtruck dead at once, and our Expectations cut-off for ever; we are utterly ruined beyond the Reach of Re-

medy; beyond the Help of Time, and all the Powers of Patience.

Can we then be too careful, too ſolicitous, about this important Affair, this everlaſting Concern? Can we reject any Means, or neglect any Opportunities of ſecuring it? Ought we not rather to accept willingly, and even ſeek diligently, whatever may aſſiſt us therein, or contribute to our Succeſs? Does not That Counſel deſerve to be hearkened to, which warns us to "flee from the Wrath to come," and not to "neglect ſo great" ſo eternal, a "Salvation?" which is meant to withdraw our Affections from this vain tranſitory World, and fix them on the Joys and Glories of a bleſſed Immortality? In ſhort, If there be any Wiſdom in refuſing and deſpiſing Admonitions of this Nature, it will be impoſſible to prove that there is any ſuch thing as Folly, or even to underſtand what it means. — But,

After all, however lightly we may eſteem the Helps and Directions of human Wiſdom, yet ſurely the higheſt Regard and Reverence are due to divine. Whatever we may think of the Advices of mere Men, yet This can be no Reaſon for neglecting thoſe that are inſpired! If we will not mind fallible Counſellors, yet ſhall we give no heed to Prophets and Apoſtles? Shall we not hearken to the Son of God, the Saviour of the World; who came into it on Purpoſe to inſtruct and direct

direct us, and guide us in the Way to everlasting Salvation?

Lastly, Shall we not attend, devoutly and diligently attend, to the Counsels of our Heavenly Father, and the Admonitions of the Most-High? Can we have more Regard to what is "right in our own Eyes," than to what is right in His? Dare we not trust Omniscience? Is it possible for us to imagine that infinite Wisdom cannot direct us better than we ourselves, or the most penetrating of our Fellow-Creatures?

But, not to expostulate any further. The Thing itself speaks so plain, that nothing can make it plainer.

I shall therefore Conclude with the Words of Wisdom, or rather the God of Wisdom, delivered to us by our royal Author:

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; but ye have set at naught my Counsel, and despised all my Reproof: I also will laugh at your Calamity, I will mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction as a Whirlwind: when Distress and Anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated Knowledge, & did not choose the Fear of the Lord; therefore shall they eat of the Fruit of

their own Way, and be filled with their own Devices. But whoso hearkeneth unto me, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from Fear of all Evil."

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLV.

Bad Company,
Evil Tendency of it, with Means to prevent it.

1 Cor. xv. 33. "Be not deceived; evil Communi-
"cations corrupt good Manners."

Though human Nature be now fallen from its original Honor, ſeveral good Principles ſtill remain in the Hearts of Men. There are few, if any, on whoſe Minds the Reverence of a Supreme Being continues not, in ſome Degree, impreſſed. In every Breaſt, ſome benevolent Affections are found; and Conſcience ſtill retains a Senſe of the Diſtinction between Moral Good and Evil.

Theſe Principles of Virtue are always ſuſceptible of Improvement; and, in favourable Situations, might have a happy Influence on Practice. But ſuch is the Frailty of our Nature, and ſo numerous are the Temptations to Evil, that they are in perpetual Hazard of being either totally effaced, or ſo far weakened as to produce no Effect on Conduct. They are good Seeds

ſown

ſown originally in the Heart; but which require Culture in Order to make them riſe to any Maturity. If left without Aſſiſtance, they are likely to be ſtifled by that Profuſion of noxious Weeds which the Soil ſends forth around them.

Among the numerous Cauſes which introduce Corruption into the Heart, and accellerate its Growth, none is more unhappily powerful than That which is pointed out in the Text, under the Deſcription of "evil Communications;" (i.e) the Contagion which is diffuſed by bad Examples, and heightened by particular Connections with Perſons of looſe Principles, or diſſolute Morals.

However laudable, or Matter of Duty it may be for certain Perſons ſometimes to aſſociate with Sinners for their Converſion; or, however firm and ſettled Age and Experience may be for their own Security, (*) yet, as all Men have not that Command of themſelves, but are liable to be caught by Temptation, we may therefore well be allowed to guard againſt ſo dangerous a Coaſt, to point out the unſuſpected Dangers of it, and warn the unwary Paſſenger where they lie: We may ſhew him what Hazards his Youth and Inexperience run, how little he can gain by the Adventure, and how much

(*) *Qui cùm Ingenii conſtitatur ejuſmodi, neque commovetur Animus in eâ Re, ſcias tùm jàm ipſum habere poſſe ſuæ Vitæ Modum.*

much wiſer and better it would be to ſeek Occaſions rather to improve his little Stock of Virtue, than inconſiderately expoſe it to ſo unequal a Chance, where the beſt he can hope is but to return ſafe with his own; but where, probably, he may be ſo unfortunate as to loſe it all; be loſt himſelf, and undone forever.

Tho the Comforts of human Life depend on Society, though it is a Pleaſure of the firſt Magnitude; yet Company is ſo dangerous, that it oftentimes becomes the Source of our greateſt Misfortunes, and he that enters into it, has almoſt as many Snares as Companions. — But, therefore, ſhall we take Diſguſt at the World? Shall we run into Deſerts, to avoid Society, and bury ourſelves in Solitude, for Fear of being infected? Shall we quit our Stations in Life, turn ſavage by ourſelves, and ſuffer no Company, for Fear of bad? No: It is ſufficient only that we uſe Caution; that we borrow Aſſiſtances from our Senſe, our Reaſon and Education; that our Words and Manners be ſtrict and unblemiſhed, and that we labour neither to be ſeduced to our Detriment; nor, by any Means, to ſeduce others. (*) This

(*) The Love of Company and of ſocial Pleaſures is natural, and attended with ſome of the ſweeteſt Satisfactions in Life, but when it is immoderate or indiſcriminate, it is hurtful.

To derive, therefore, the proper Pleaſure and Improvement from Company, it ought to be ſelect, and to conſiſt of Perſons of Charac-

This is a Point of ſuch Importance, that upon it depends the whole Courſe of our Lives and Manners: the frequenting with wicked Companions, brings Men acquainted with Vice, makes them behold it without Emotion; by Degrees they begin to act it with ſome Pleaſure, and Time breeds in them a Habit of loving it. (*) In

ter, reſpectable both for their Morals and their Underſtandings.

Mixed and undiſtinguiſhed Society tends only to diſſipate our Ideas, and induce a Laxity of Principles and Practice. The Pleaſure it affords is of a coarſe and brutal Kind. Indeed, it commonly ends in Wearineſs and Diſguſt, as many will confeſs, whoſe chief Good ſeems to conſiſt in living in a Multitude. The Dreſs and other Circumſtances attending much Company, ſcarcely leave a Moment for Reflection; Day after Day is ſpent in the ſame tireſome Round, till an unhappy Habit is formed, that renders ſuch a Courſe of Life almoſt neceſſary. — As to the Number of Perſons in an agreeable ſelect Party, it ſhould not exceed the Number of the Muſes, nor be leſs than that of the Graces.

(*) St. Auguſtine, by a low, but very apt Alluſion, has ſet out the Danger of ill Company. "It is a Nail (ſays he) driven into a Poſt with a Hammer, which, after the firſt and ſecond Stroke, may be drawn out with a little Difficulty; but being once driven up to the Head, the Pinchers can take no Hold to draw it out, which cannot be done, but by Deſtruction of the Wood."

It is even thus with Regard to Society: we may be eaſily weaned from pernicious Companions, before they are faſtened to our Souls, and incorporated with us; but when once they have taken-hold of us by a ſtrong and deep Intereſt, the Separation cannot be made without

In ſpeaking, therefore, to this Subject, I ſhall trace the Progreſs of this Principle of Corruption, and examine the Means by which "evil Communications" gradually undermine, and at laſt "deſtroy good Manners."

It is, indeed, diſagreeable to contemplate Human Nature, in this downward Courſe of its Progreſs. But it is always profitable to know our own Infirmities and Dangers. The Conſideration of them will lead us to ſuggeſt ſome of the Means proper to be uſed for preventing the Miſchiefs ariſing from them.

Agreeably to what hath been already ſaid, of certain virtuous Principles being inherent in human Nature, there are few but who ſet out at firſt in the World with good Diſpoſitions. The Warmth which belongs to Youth, naturally exerts itſelf in generous Feelings and Sentiments of Honour; in ſtrong Attatchments to Friends, and the other Emotions of a kind and tender Heart. Almoſt all the Plans with which Perſons, who have been liberally educated, begin the World, are connected with honourable Views. At That Period they re-

without imminent Danger. — The phyſical Advice of the Poet is very applicable to this Subject;

Principiis obſta, ſero Medicina paratur,
Cum Mala per longas invaluêre Moras.
Venienti occurrite Morbo. — Cavendo tutus.

Serm. CCCXLV.

repudiate whatever is mean and baſe. It is pleaſing to them to think, of commanding the Eſteem of thoſe among whom they live, and of acquiring a Name among Men.

But alaſs! How ſoon does this flattering Proſpect begin to overcaſt? Deſires of Pleaſure uſher in Temptation, and forward the Growth of diſorderly Paſſions. Miniſters of Vice are ſeldom wanting to encourage, and flatter, the Paſſions of the Young. Inferiors ſtudy to creep into Favour, by ſervile Obſequiouſneſs to all their Deſires and Humours.

Glad to find any Apology for the Indulgences of which they are fond, the Young too readily liſten to the Voice of thoſe who ſuggeſt to them, that ſtrict Notions of Religion, Order, and Virtue, are ſtale and illiberal; that the Reſtraints which they impoſe are only fit to be preſcribed to thoſe who are in their firſt Stage of Pupillage; or to be preached to the lower Rank, who ought to be kept within the cloſeſt Bounds of Regularity and Subjection. But the Goodneſs of their Hearts, it is inſinuated to them, and the Liberality of their Views, will fully juſtify the emancipating themſelves, in ſome Degree, from the rigid Diſcipline of Parents and Teachers.

Soothing as ſuch Inſinuations are to the Youthful, and Inconſiderate, their Steps, however, in Vice, are cau-

cautious and timid, and occaſionally checked by Remorſe. As they begin to mingle more in the World, and emerge in the Circles of Gaiety and Pleaſure, finding theſe looſe Ideas countenanced by too general Practice, they gradually become bolder in the Liberties they take. If they have been bred to Buſineſs, they begin to tire of Induſtry. If they be of ſuperior Rank, it becomes them to reſemble their Equals; to aſſume that Freedom of Behaviour, that Air of Forwardneſs, that Tone of Diſſipation, that eaſy Negligence of thoſe with whom they converſe, which appear faſhionable in high Life. If Affluence of Fortune unhappily concur to favour their Inclinations, Amuſements and Diverſions ſucceed in a perpetual Round, and they run into many Degrees of Exceſs, diſagreeable even to themſelves, merely from weak Compliſance, and the Fear of being ridiculed by their looſe Aſſociates; among whom the moſt hardened and determined always take the Lead. The reſt follow with implicit Submiſſion, and make Proficiency in this School of Iniquity, in exact Proportion to the Weakneſs of their Underſtanding, and the Strength of their Paſſions.

How many paſs away, after this Manner, ſome of the moſt valuable Years of their Life, loſt in the Maze of what cannot be called Pleaſure, ſo much as mere Giddineſs and Folly? In the Habits of perpetual Con-

nection with idle and licentious Company all Reflection is loſt; whilſt circulated from one empty Head, and one thoughtleſs Heart to another, Folly ſhoots up into all its moſt ridiculous Forms; prompts the extravagant, unmeaning Frolick in private; or ſallies-forth in public into mad Riot; impelled ſometimes by Intoxication, ſometimes by mere Levity of Spirits.

All the while, amidſt this whole Courſe of Juvenile Infatuation, we readily admit, that much Good-Nature may ſtill remain. Generoſity and Attachments may be found; nay, ſome Awe of Religion may ſtill ſubſiſt, and ſome Remains of thoſe good Impreſſions which were made by early Education. Conſequently,

It might yet be very poſſible to reclaim ſuch Perſons, and to form them for uſeful and reſpectable Stations in the World, if virtuous and improving Society ſhould happily ſucceed to the Place of thoſe careleſs and vicious Companions, with whom they now aſſociate; if important Buſineſs ſhould occur, to bring them into a different Sphere of Action; or if ſome ſeaſonable Stroke of Affliction ſhould in Mercy be ſent, to recal them to themſelves, and to awaken ſerious and manly Thought.

But if Youth, Health, and Spirits, and flowing Fortune continue; if a ſimilar Succeſſion of Companions go on to amuſe them, to ingroſs their Time, and to ſtir-up

ſtir up their Paſſions; the Day of Ruin, (let them take heed, and beware!) the Day of irretrievable Ruin, begins to draw nigh. Fortune is ſquandered, Health is broken, Friends are offended, affronted, eſtranged; and aged Parents, perhaps, ſent afflicted and mourning, to the Duſt. — But,

As there are certain Degrees of Vice which are chiefly ſtamped with the Character of the ridiculous, and the contemptible; ſo, there are alſo certain Limits, beyond which, if it paſs, it becomes odious and execrable.

If, to other Corruptions which the Heart has already received, be added the Infuſion of ſceptical Principles, That worſt of all the "evil Communications" of Sinners, the Whole of Morals is then on the Point of being overthrown.

For, every Crime can then be palliated to Conſcience; every Check and Reſtraint which had hitherto remained, is taken away. He who, in the Beginning of his Courſe, ſoothed himſelf with the Thought, that while he indulged his Deſires, he hurted no One; now, preſſed by the Neceſſity of ſupplying thoſe Wants into which his expenſive Pleaſures have brought him, goes on without Remorſe to defraud, and to oppreſs.

The Lover of Pleaſure, now becomes hardened and cruel; violates his Truſt, or betrays his Friend; be-

comes a Man of Treachery, or a Man of Blood; ſatisfying, or at leaſt endeavouring all the while to ſatisfy himſelf, that Circumſtances form his Excuſe; that by Neceſſity he is impelled; and that in gratifying the Paſſions which Nature hath implanted in him, he does no more than follow Nature.

Miſerable and deluded Man! To what art thou come at laſt? Doſt thou pretend to follow Nature when thou art contemning the Laws of the God of Nature? When thou art ſtifling his Voice within thee, which remonſtrates againſt thy Crimes? When thou art violating the beſt Part of thy Nature, by counteracting the Dictates of Juſtice and Humanity? Doſt thou follow Nature, when thou rendereſt thyſelf an uſeleſs Animal on the Earth; and not only uſeleſs, but noxious to the Society to which thou belongeſt, and to which thou art a Diſgrace; noxious by the bad Example thou haſt ſet, and noxious by the Crimes thou haſt committed; ſacrificing Innocence to thy guilty Pleaſures, and introducing Shame and Ruin into the Habitations of Peace; defrauding of their Due the Unſuſpicious who have truſted thee; involving in the Ruins of thy Fortune, many a worthy Family; reducing the Induſtrious and the Aged to Miſery & Want: By all which, if thou haſt eſcaped the deſerved Sword of Juſtice, thou haſt, at leaſt, brought on thyſelf the

Re-

Reſentment, and Reproach of all the Reſpectable and Worthy. Tremble then at the View of the Gulph which is opening before thee. Look with Horror at the Precipice, on the Brink of which thou ſtandeſt: and if yet a Moment be left to retreat, think how thou mayſt eſcape, and be ſaved. — This brings me,

Secondly, To ſuggeſt ſome Means that may be uſed for ſtopping in Time the Progreſs of ſuch Miſchiefs; to point-out ſome Remedies againſt the fatal Infection of "evil Communications."

The firſt, and moſt obvious, is, to withdraw from all Aſſociations with bad Men; with Perſons either of licentious Principles, or of diſordered Practice.

I have ſhown to what Iſſue ſuch dangerous Connections are apt to bring Men at laſt. Nothing therefore, is of more Importance for the Young, than to be careful in the Choice of their Friends and Companions. This Choice is too frequently made without much Thought, or is determined by ſome caſual Connection; and yet, very often, the whole Fate of their future Life depends upon it. The Circumſtances which chiefly attract the Liking and the Friendſhip of Youth, are Vivacity, good Humour, engaging Manners, and a cheerful or eaſy Temper; Qualities, it is confeſſed, amiable in themſelves, and uſeful and valuable in their Place. But we intreat you to remember, that Theſe are

not all the Qualities requiſite to form an intimate Companion or Friend. Something more is ſtill to be looked for; a ſound Underſtanding, a ſteady Mind, and a firm Attachment to Principle, to Virtue, and Honour.

As only ſolid Bodies poliſh well, it is only on the ſubſtantial Ground of theſe manly Endowments, that the other amiable Qualities can receive their proper Luſtre. Deſtitute of theſe eſſential Requiſites, they ſhine with no more than a tinſel Brilliancy. It may ſparkle for a little, amidſt a few Circles of the Frivolous, and Superficial; but it impoſes not on the Diſcernment of the Public. The World in general ſeldom, after a ſhort Trial, judges amiſs of the Characters of Men. You may be aſſured, that its Character of you will be formed by the Company you frequent; and how agreeable ſoever they may ſeem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but ſuperficial Qualities, and external Accompliſhments, they will ſoon fall down into the Claſs, at beſt, of the Inſignificant, perhaps of the Worthleſs; and you ſink, of Courſe, in the Opinion of the Public, into the ſame deſpicable Rank.

Allow me to warn you, therefore, that the moſt gay and pleaſing, are ſomtimes the moſt inſidious and dangerous Companions; an Admonition which reſpects both the Sexes. Often they attach themſelves to you from intereſted Motives; and if any Taint of Suſpicion

on lie on their Character, under the Cover of your Rank, your Fortune, or your good Reputation, they ſeek Protection for themſelves. Look round you, then, with attentive Eye, and weigh Characters well before you connect yourſelves too cloſely with any who court your Society. "He that walketh with wiſe Men ſhall be wiſe; but a Companion of Fools ſhall be deſtroyed." Wherefore, "enter not thou into the Counſel of the Scorner. Walk not in the Way with evil Men; avoid it, paſs not by it, turn from it, and paſs away."

SERMON CCCXLVI.

On the ſame Subject.

Means to prevent it, continued.

1 Cor. xv. 33. "Be not deceived; evil Communi-
"cations corrupt good Manners."

Having already proved from theſe Words, the evil Tendency of bad Company, I proceeded to ſuggeſt (under) ſome

Ill Examples, Pleaſure and Eaſe, are, doubtleſs great Corruptera of Manners: and, as ill Air may endanger a good Conſtitution, ſo may either a Place or Perſon of ill Example endanger a good Man. He that converſeth with the Proud, will inſenſibly be puffed up; and an Acquaintance with the Licentious and Diſſolute will teach a Man to be a Libertine and incontinent. See 2 Sam. xxii. 26, 27.

not all the Qualities requiſite to form an intimate Companion or Friend. Something more is ſtill to be looked for; a ſound Underſtanding, a ſteady Mind, and a firm Attachment to Principle, to Virtue, and Honour.

As only ſolid Bodies poliſh well, it is only on the ſubſtantial Ground of theſe manly Endowments, that the other amiable Qualities can receive their proper Luſtre. Deſtitute of theſe eſſential Requiſites, they ſhine with no more than a tinſel Brilliancy. It may ſparkle for a little, amidſt a few Circles of the Frivolous, and Superficial; but it impoſes not on the Diſcernment of the Public. The World in general ſeldom, after a ſhort Trial, judges amiſs of the Characters of Men. You may be aſſured, that its Character of you will be formed by the Company you frequent; and how agreeable ſoever they may ſeem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but ſuperficial Qualities, and external Accompliſhments, they will ſoon fall down into the Claſs, at beſt, of the Inſignificant, perhaps of the Worthleſs; and you ſink, of Courſe, in the Opinion of the Public, into the ſame deſpicable Rank.

Allow me to warn you, therefore, that the moſt gay and pleaſing, are ſomtimes the moſt inſidious and dangerous Companions; an Admonition which reſpects both the Sexes. Often they attach themſelves to you from intereſted Motives; and if any Taint of Suſpici-

on

on lie on their Character, under the Cover of your ſome of the Means to be uſed for the ſtopping, in Time, the Progreſs of this Evil. And Firſt,

The firſt, and moſt obvious Method, then pointed out, was, to withdraw ourſelves from all Aſſociation with bad Men.

It is a fair Step, &c. ☞ (under)

It is a fair Step towards Happineſs and Virtue to delight in the Converſation of good and wiſe Men. But no Profit can be reaped from ſuch whoſe Morals are corrupt. — For,

As there are peculiar Charms in That which is good and excellent, ſo there is a kind of Contagion in That which is evil: Men are exceeding apt to do according to the Deeds of others, however evil. (*) Every

(*) — *Tua Res agitur Paries cum proximus ardet.*
Proximus a Tectis Ignis defenditur ægrè.
Et neglecta ſolent Incendia ſumere Vires.

Ill Examples, Pleaſure and Eaſe, are, doubtleſs great Corrupters of Manners: and, as ill Air may endanger a good Conſtitution, ſo may either a Place or Perſon of ill Example endanger a good Man. He that converſeth with the Proud, will inſenſibly be puffed up; and an Acquaintance with the Licentious and Diſſolute will teach a Man to be a Libertine and incontinent. See 2 Sam. xxii. 26, 27.

Every Day's Experience furniſhes us with many and ſad Inſtances of the Influence of bad Examples.

When Men by theſe find the Way to Wickedneſs, by Cuſtom and Practice, made eaſy and delightful to walk in; when they ſee it hath been frequented by others before them, how eaſily are they led to "follow a Multitude to do evil." It has a ſecret Power and unſpeakable Influence upon thoſe with whom we converſe, to form them into the ſame Diſpoſition and Manners: to "go, and do likewiſe."

It is the ſhorteſt, the moſt prevalent, and indeed the moſt dangerous Method of Temptation; it operates more powerfully and inſenſibly than Precept and Inſtruction. For Wickedneſs is hereby made viſible to the

and Pſal. xviii. 25, 26. — Hannibal himſelf was unmanned by the Looſeneſs of Campanea; and tho a Conqueror by his Arms, was overcome by his Pleaſures, and ſhrunk from all the Glory obtained at Cannæ, by the Luxury he ſuffered himſelf to fall into at Capua.

Let us know never ſo many ſage Rules for our Conduct, and be taught by written Wiſdom to avoid the Paths of Error and Hazard; yet if we meet with living Precedents to warrant our Deviation, the Inſtruction looſes-ground in the Mind, and we are won to Vice and Folly by the powerful Influence of evil Communication.

Example draws where Precept fails.

"A little Leaven leaveneth the whole Lump."

——— —— *Dedit hanc Contagio Labem,*
Et dedit in plures, ſicut Grex totus in Agris
Unius Scabie cadit, et Porrigine Porci.
Quis juxtà Claudum habitat, conclaudicare diſcet.

the Eye, in all its Circumſtances to captivate and allure: it is not without Reaſon, therefore, that we are commanded to avoid them, leſt our own ſhould be corrupted by converſing with them. — For,

It is not only by what we do ourſelves, but alſo by what we ſee others do, that vicious Habits gain upon us; for, there are moral as well as natural Diſeaſes, of a contagious Quality to thoſe that come near; ſuch as certainly will infect, except Men are armed beforehand by Reaſon, with ſtrong Antidotes againſt the Power of their ſpreading Peſtilence.

Hence Solomon makes uſe of thoſe lively Reſemblances to expreſs our Danger in this Caſe: "Can a Man take Fire into his Boſom, and not be burnt? Can one go upon hot Coals unhurt?" It is impoſſible to frequent and delight in bad Company, without receiving Damage and contracting Pollution.

When God brought his People into Canaan, He commanded them to deſtroy all the idolatrous Inhabitants of the Land.

This was enjoined, not only as a Puniſhment for the paſt Abominations with which thoſe wicked Men had provoked him, but alſo for the better Security of thoſe New-comers, leſt they ſhould mingle with them and ſo learn their Works: The Contagion of Vice is powerful, our greateſt Security therefore is in ſtanding at a

Diſtance from it: the Frailty of Virtue is great, therefore, all Caution ſhould be uſed not to expoſe it to an infectious Air. Young Perſons eſpecially when they firſt appear in the World, ought to have a particular Regard to it, their future Happineſs, both temporal and eternal, depending ſo much on the Qualifications of thoſe with whom they converſe. Tho they have already received good Principles in their Education, yet they want Practice to confirm the Habits of Virtue, and Courage to reſiſt the Allurements of Vice. They are apt to catch at every thing that indulges and countenances their irregular Appetites. — And! The great Misfortune is, that when they want Prudence moſt, they have leaſt of it. Happy is it, therefore, when they will liſten to the Advice of the Experienced, who are able to direct them in an Affair of ſuch Conſequence. — Indeed,

The venturing ourſelves in "evil Communications" needs no other Proof of the infinite Danger attending it, than the numberleſs Inſtances of Souls hardened in all Manner of Wickedneſs by ill Examples, and profligate bad Company: for with a vicious Companion it is hard to retain Innocence. (*) The juſteſt Abhorrences

(*) *Confuetudo Malorum bonos Mores contaminat.*
Corrumpit Mores Turba Impudentium.

rences cool and wear-off by being drawn in first to a liking of the Wit and Perſons, and then to a favourable Judgment of the Failings of our Friends; till, at laſt, we grow partial to their very Vices, and even like them for our Friend's Sake: and no Exceſſes or profane Liberties are ſo dreadful, but we are content to ſee, to allow, and comply-with, and even take-delight in: it being natural to eſteem and vindicate the Actions of our Friends and Acquaintance. (*)

Thus do the very things, which uſed formerly to raiſe in us the greateſt Indignation and even Aſtoniſhment, engage firſt our Affections, and then our Imitation; and we, by Degrees, are formed into thoſe Prodigies of Wickedneſs which we heretofore ſtood amazed at.

Thus do theſe Peſts of human Society ſcatter the Plague wherefoever they are; and not only ruin themſelves eternally, but alſo make their Acquaintance, too too often, by the Force of their Cuſtom, Perſuaſion, or

A Place of ill Example may endanger a good Man.
Evil Company makes the Good, bad; and the Bad, worſe.
Fools and Knaves are not Companions for honeſt Men.
Milvum comedens, et ipſe Milvus eris.
See the Note, Page 189.

(*) *Credula Res Amor eſt.*
Sen. CCCXLV.

or Example, as much or "more the Children of Hell than themſelves."

We find the Scriptures therefore every where replete with ſtrong and preſſing Exhortations to avoid ſuch Incendiaries to Evil.

The principal Paſſages of Scripture relating hereto are theſe that follow.

"Bleſſed is the Man that walketh not in the Counſel of the Ungodly, nor ſtandeth in the Way of Sinners, nor ſitteth in the Seat of the Scornful."

"I have not dealt with vain Perſons, neither will I have Fellowſhip with the Deceitful."

"I have hated the Congregation of Evil-doers, and will not ſit among the Ungodly."

"A froward Heart ſhall depart from me, I will not know a wicked Perſon."

"He that walketh with wiſe Men ſhall be wiſe, but a Companion of Fools ſhall be deſtroyed." — To which we may add That of the wiſe Son of Sirach:

"He that toucheth Pitch ſhall be defiled therewith, and he that hath Fellowſhip with a proud Man, ſhall be like unto him."

In the New Teſtament St. Paul tells the Corinthians, that "if any Man that is called a Brother, be a Fornicator, or Covetous, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, with ſuch a One, no, not to eat." And,

In

In his Second Epiſtle, "be ye not unequally yoked together with Unbelievers; for, what Fellowſhip hath Righteouſneſs with Unrighteouſneſs? What Communion hath Light with Darkneſs? and what Concord hath Chriſt with Belial? or, what Part hath he that believeth with an Infidel? and what Agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols? for, ye are the Temple of the living God; as God hath ſaid, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they ſhall be my People: Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye ſeparated, ſaith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you."

Once more: — "We command you, Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye withdraw yourſelves from every Brother that walketh diſorderly, and not after the Tradition which ye received of us."

Agreeably whereto is That Exhortation to the Romans, "I beſeech you, Brethren, mark them that cauſe Diviſions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." — And,

In the Words before us, "Be not deceived: Evil Communications corrupt good Manners." (*) And

(*) Appoſite to the above, are the following Citations from Heathen Authors. *Subduce tanſum, pro Viribus, ab Improborum Conſortio; at Sodalibus integerrimis tenue adjunge, quorum Convictu fias melior. Corrumpunt enim Mores bonos Colloquia prava: probus autem Sodalis*

And now, after all these many and express Texts of Scripture, particularly and immediately intending to guard against Temptations to Sin, through the Emissaries of evil, need I expatiate further hereon?

Let me particularly guard you, therefore, according to your several Stations, to fulfil the Duty and Trust that is committed to you. — For,

As the Rule of Men's Lives, is, for the most Part, what they see other Men do, and not what they are taught, or think themselves obliged to; (*) how doth it become all Men (if they would not betray themselves, and "ensnare their weak Brother for whom Christ died") to be upon their Guard in all their Words and Works;

nonnunquàm Sodalem reddit meliorem. — A Bonis bona perdiscet; quòd malè adhæserit, quam habet Mentem præcidatis perdet. — Ex Improbis Convictoribus nihil aliud potest capi Fructus, nisi Probrum et Ignominiam.

(*) Men may give Credit to their Ears, but they take much stronger Impressions from Example than from Precept.

In omnibus ferè minùs valent Præcepta, quàm Experimenta.
Segnùs irritant Animos demissa per Aures,
Quàm quæ sunt Oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipse sibi tradit Spectator. ——
Longum Iter per Præcepta, efficax et breve per Exempla.
Validiora sunt Exempla quàm Verba, et planiùs Opere docetur quàm Voce.

It often happens that what we *read* or *hear*, tho we firmly believe it to be right, we neglect to put it in Practice; but what we *see*, tho we know it to be a wrong Strain, and of fatal Consequence, we are too subject to follow & imitate. Actions speak louder than Words.

Works; especially such as are in a more distinguished State of Life, as Parents, and Masters of Families!

Without a conformable Conversation the best Instruction will profit but little, will indeed be without Foundation if they are not seconded and confirmed by our own good Example and Practice.

Besides a tender Regard, then, to ourselves and our own Interests, which every Man, out of a natural Desire of being happy, and Dread of being miserable, should be forward to consider; let us reflect of how great Influence our Example is to those about us.

This is applicable to a great many whose Station in Life renders their Example so powerful as to be able almost to give Authority to either Virtue or Vice.

Domestick, in general, copy the Habits of the Mind, as they do the Dress & Fashions of their Superiors; (*) So that upon the Chief of Families depends, chiefly, the Ruin or Reformation of Manners, our Hope or Despair of a better World.

It is our Part, indeed, (as Ministers of the Word) to exhort Men to their Duty, But it is Parents and Masters of Families who are the most powerful and effectual Preachers of Righteousness. We may endea-

vour

(*) *Quales sunt ii, qui præsunt, tales et illis plerumque solent esse, quorum Imperio subjecti sunt.* — See Knox's Essays, No. 70. On the Effects of a bad Example of the Great among their menial Servants, Domesticks and Dependants. Serm. CCCXLV.

vour to make Men Proselytes to Virtue, but They infallibly draw Men after them. We may try to persuade, but They can certainly prevail. (*)

Let us consider, therefore, what is fit to be done; and, if we do it not, "what will the End of these things be!" Setting

(*) The Morals of the Age are said to be peculiarly corrupt. The Appeal, as a Proof, is made to the Thefts and Murders which abound, more than ever, among the lower Classes; and to the Corruption, Extravagance and Irreligion, which stigmatize the Age among the higher. Now,

What can tend more immediately to stop the Over-flowings of Iniquity than the Diffusion of moral and religious Instruction? And how can This be done more effectually, than by the Authority of Fathers and Masters of Families? Instruction from the Pulpit, in the Church, is too often considered as merely a Matter of Form; but when it is confirmed by the Example and Precept of a Father and a Master, it displays its fullest Efficacy.

The Father and Master of a Family, when he conscientiously watches over the Conduct of his Dependants, is a most respectable Character, and effects in the Community what cannot be effected by Laws and Magistrates either Municipal or Ecclesiastical.

Let every Master be the Chaplain of his own Family. Let due Honour and Attention be paid to the Word of God, as it appears in the Scriptures themselves, and as it is illustrated by the Eloquence of Divines, and the Public Happiness will immediately receive an unspeakable Augmentation. The Morals of the People will be purified in the Fountain, even in their Hearts; and the Blessing of God, without which no Nation can flourish, will most effectually be drawn down by general Reformation, by Amendment of Life and Manners. *In hoc Auspicium melioris Ævi.*

Setting our own Converſation aright, then, let us have equal Reſpect to the Aſſociates of thoſe about us, and not ſuffer the Wicked among them. (*)

Tho we are careful as to our own Practice; yet, That is not all that is required from us: Though we are careful not to infect thoſe under us with Wickedneſs ourſelves; yet, if we ſuffer it to be done by others, what will avail our own Circumſpection? This is but an undoing what we ourſelves have ſo carefully avoided; for, though not to ourſelves, yet, as to the Patient, it matters not who was the Inſtrument of Evil to him, if he ſhould hereby at any Time "be overtaken in a Fault." (‡)

What we have thus laid before you is by no Means a Matter of Indifference, either to ourſelves or others. To have abſtained from all Communion of Evil ourſelves, will be to us of unſpeakable Comfort, as we ſhall hereby ſave our own Souls, and be "pure and free from the Blood of all Men:" — And,

As to others, their Salvation will be hereby ſecured (†) and, by preventing them from Evil, how many

(*) *Juniorum Animi malâ Diſciplinâ facilè depravantur.*

(‡) *Omne Aditum Malis præcludito.*

(†) It is certainly a great Happineſs to have virtuous Parents, Relations, Tutors, and Domeſtics; for it is from them we take our

many bitter Pangs of Repentance ſhall we finally ſave them, when in their cooler Days of Recollection, if perhaps they ſhould ever recollect at all! What Honour do we hereby do to Religion; promoting the Welfare of others, by making thoſe under us Examples of Good to them for their good, inſtead of Evil to their Deſtruction, and "as ſhining Lights in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe Generation!" — And now,

After theſe things, what ſhall we ſay of thoſe whoſe Nurſeries (*) are as "Fire-brands" ſcattered before our Gardens, to infect, to infeſt, and deſtroy; "in whoſe Mouths are Curſing and Deceit: Bitterneſs and Wrath go not out of their Ways; Idleneſs and every evil Work is before them; and the Way of Peace have they not known?" May we not ſay of them, that they are nourithed, "not only to the Hurt of the Owners of them," but alſo to be the Corrupters of our Manners, and the Promoters of all Wickedneſs; that, inſtead

of Principles. We are born naked both as to Body and Mind, and put on any Habit indifferently which is firſt offered us.

Magni refert quibuſcum vixeris. Bona bonis Prognata Parentibus.

(*) A Man ſhall be known by his Children.

Improborum improba Soboles.

Sicut Arbor a Fructu cognoſcitur, et Fructus per Arborem demonſtratur; ſic Parentes cognoſcuntur in Filiis, et Filii per Parentes. Ut Quiſque ſuum vult eſſe, ita eſt. Mali Corvi, malum Ovum. Sicut Pater ſic Filius.

inſtead of being educated and trained-up for uſeful Members of Society, and meet Heirs for future Glory, probably will be the Terror of our Nights, and the Offence of our Days; a public Burden and Diſhonour; and (O dire Reflection!) Heirs only of future Damnation.

Setting aright therefore our own Converſation and Lives, let us proceed to the more immediate right-governing of thoſe under our more particular Charge; and, as far as our Influence will lead, to all that are around us. — But,

If, after all, there ſhould be any of ſo profligate a Diſpoſition as not to be reclaimed, but will ſtill "continue to do wickedly," to their own preſent and eternal Danger, and to the Infection of others, let us avoid them as the only Way to maintain our Integrity; in ſo doing we ſhall ſave our Souls, and their Blood will be upon themſelves only. — In a Word,

Since ſo much depends upon our Connections in Life, and the Society of Individuals here on Earth, how careful ought we to be in forming the Intimacies of our Friendſhip, (*) and in avoiding the ſeveral Peſts of

(*) Much Prudence is required in the Choice of our Companions. In the Society of our Equals we may find Pleaſure; with our Superiors Profit: but it is always the ſure Mark of an abject Temper to be ambitious of being the Firſt of any Company whatever. It

of Society! "There is a Friend that loveth at all Times; and a Brother that is born for Adverſity. Thine own Friend, and thy Father's Friend, forſake not." (*) Let us beware of all raſh and dangerous Connections which may afterwards load us with Diſhonour; leſt, by forming ourſelves on fantaſtic Models, and vying with one another in every reigning Folly, we begin firſt with being ridiculous, and end in Vice and Immorality: At leaſt, let us remember, that by the Character of thoſe with whom we converſe, our own Converſation will moſt likely be formed, and will certainly be judged of by the World. (‡)

But

Is the certain Way to grow worſe: the beſt Means to improve, is to be the Leaſt there. But, above all, be the Companion of them that fear the Lord, and keep his Commandments. There is nothing puts better Thoughts in a Man, than a good Companion: and, beſides the Improvement we have by being with them, we gain Credit and Eſteem to ourſelves by it. Keep good Company, if you would keep a good Name.

(*) "A faithful Friend is a ſtrong Defence, and he that hath found ſuch a One, hath found a Treaſure; nothing can countervail him; his Excellence is invaluable: he is a Medicine of Life; and he that feareth the Lord ſhall find him." See Vol. x. Page 151, &c. on Friendſhip, the Qualifications and Benefits of it.

(‡) 'Tis certain, by our Choice of Friends,
Our good or evil Name depends.

Qualis quiſque ſit, talium Conſortio delectatur. Si quis Malorum gaudet Commercio, vagare qualis ipſe ſit, non eſt opus; nàm quiſque ſimilis

eſt

But further, — In Order to prevent the Influence of "evil Communications," it is needful, that we fix to ourſelves certain Principles of Conduct, and be reſolved, on no Occaſion, to ſwerve from them.

Setting the Conſideration of Religion and Virtue aſide, and attending merely to Intereſt and Reputation, it will be found, that he who enters on active Life without having aſcertained ſome regular Plan, according to

eſt Sodalitii ſui. Morum maximum Teſtimonium eſt, cum Hominibus Congreſſum. Cum Optimis habeto Conſuetudinem, omnes enim talem te judicabunt, cum quibus conſpexerint te Conſuetudinem agere; deindè Bonorum Convictu redderis melior.

There is no ſurer Mark nor Diſcovery of a Man, than to judge him by the Company he keeps, it being impoſſible but that he ſhall much reſemble them, and partake of ſome of their Qualities.

Simile ſimili gaudet. Pares cum paribus facilimè congregantur.

Sancti in Cœtu Sanctorum exultant.

Bad Company is very contagious to the wiſeſt and moſt ſettled Men.

Qui juxtà Claudum habitat, concandicare diſcet;
Diſcet enim citiùs, meminitque libentiùs illud,
Quod quis deridet, quàm quod probat et veneratur.
Turpiter obliquo claudicat ille Pede.
Ululà cum Lupis, cum quibus converſaris.
Vociferante uno, etiam alter Belluino Impetu fertur.
Latrante uno, latrat ſtatim et alter Canis. Fatuus Fatuum invenit.

Vulgar, low Expreſſions, awkward Motions and Addreſs, vilify, as they imply a low Turn of Mind, or low Education, or low Company; for, it is impoſſible to ſuppoſe that a Man can have frequented good Company, without having caught ſomething, at leaſt, of their Air and Behaviour. — Serm. CCCXLV.

to which he is to guide himſelf, will be unproſperous in the Whole of his ſucceeding Progreſs. But, when Conduct is viewed in a moral and religious Light, the Effect of having fixed no Principles of Action, of having formed no laudable Standard of Character, becomes more obviouſly fatal.

From hence it is, that the Young and the Thoughtleſs imbibe ſo readily the Poiſon of "evil Communications," and fall a Prey to every Seducer. They have no internal Guide whom they are accuſtomed to follow and obey; nothing within themſelves, that can give Firmneſs to their Conduct. They are, of Courſe, the Victims of momentary Inclination or Caprice; religious and good by Turns; when during the Abſence of Temptation and Tempters, the virtuous Principle ſtirs within them; but never long the ſame; changing and fluctuating according to the Paſſion that chances to riſe, or the Inſtigation of thoſe with whom they converſe. — Whereas,

If they acted on a Syſtem, if their Behaviour made it appear that they were determined to conduct themſelves by certain Rules and Principles, not only would they eſcape innumerable Dangers, but they would command Reſpect from the Licentious themſelves. Evil-doers would ceaſe to lay their Snares for One who they ſaw moving above them, in a higher Sphere, and with a more ſteady Courſe. — Again, As

As a further Corrective of "evil Communications;" and, as a Foundation to thoſe Principles which we lay down for Conduct, let us ſometimes think ſeriouſly, of what conſtitutes real Enjoyment and Happineſs.

Our Days cannot be entirely ſpent in Company and Pleaſure. How cloſely ſoever you are ſurrounded and beſieged by evil Companions, there muſt be ſome Intervals, in which you muſt be left to yourſelves; when, after the Turbulence of Amuſement is over, your Mind will naturally aſſume a graver and more thoughtful Caſt. Theſe are precious Intervals to you, if you knew their Value. Seize, therefore, That ſober Hour of Retirement and Silence; and ſeriouſly improve it. Indulge the Meditations which then begin to riſe. Caſt your Eye backward on what is paſt; look forward to what is probably to come. Think of the Part you are now acting; and of what remains to be acted, perhaps to be ſuffered, before you die. Then is the Time to form your Plans of Happineſs, not merely for the preſent, but for the general Courſe of Life; for, what is pleaſing now, will not be equally ſo hereafter. That which continues longeſt to pleaſe, is always moſt valuable. Recollect your own Feelings in the different Scenes of Life; on what Occaſions you have felt the trueſt Satisfaction; whether Days of Sobriety and rational Employment,

have not left behind them a more agreeable Remembrance, than Nights of Licentiouſneſs and Riot. Look round you on the World; reflect on the different Societies which have fallen under your Obſervation; and think who among them appear to enjoy Life to moſt Advantage; whether they who, encircled by gay Companions, are conſtantly fatiguing themſelves in Queſt of Pleaſure; or they to whom Pleaſure comes unſought, in the Courſe of an active, virtuous, and manly Life. Compare together theſe two Claſſes of Mankind, and aſk your own Hearts, to which of them you would chuſe to belong.

If, in a happy Moment, the Light of Truth begin to break in upon you; O! refuſe not Admittance to the Ray, ſhut it not from thee. If your Hearts ſecretly reproach you for the wrong Choice you have made, bethink yourſelves that the Evil is not irreparable: ſtill there is Time for Repentance and Amendment: and a Return to Repentance is always honourable (*)

Were ſuch Meditations as theſe often indulged, the "evil Communications" of Sinners would die before them; and the Force of their Poiſon would be extinguiſhed.

Diſdain not, here alſo, to recollect, what the Wiſeſt have ſaid and written, concerning human Happineſs and

(*) *Nunquam ſera eſt ad bonas Mores Via.*

and human Vanity. Treat not their Opinions, as Effuſions merely of Peeviſhneſs or Diſappointment: but believe them to be, what they truly are, the Reſult of long Experience, and a thorough Acquaintance with the World. Conſider that the Seaſon of Youth is paſſing away; it is high Time, therefore, to be taking Meaſures for Eſtabliſhment in Life; Nay, It were wiſe to be looking forward to a placid Enjoyment of Old-age. That is a Period all wiſh to ſee; but, how miſerable when it arrives, if it yield nothing but the Dregs of Life; and preſent no Retroſpect, except that of a thoughtleſs and diſordered Youth! — Indeed,

It were adviſable to look forward ſometimes beyond Old-age, to a future World. Amidſt "evil Communications," let your Belief, and your Character as Chriſtians, ariſe to your View. Think of the ſacred Name in which you were baptized; and of the God whom your Fathers honoured and worſhiped; of the Religion in which you were trained; and of the venerable Rites in which you have been brought to partake. They are now ceaſed; "they reſt from their Labours, and their Works follow them." The Time is coming when "you alſo muſt draw after them;" and what Account will you be able to give before the Righteous Judge, at the laſt Day, of your preſent trifling and irregular Conduct?

Theſe Thoughts, perhaps, may be treated as unſeaſonable Intruſions; but intrude they ſometimes will whether welcome or not. Better then to allow them free Reception when they come, and to conſider fairly to what they lead; and let your Conduct be as your cloſing Eyes would wiſh at laſt to end your Days. Theſe Thoughts would riſe us ſuperior to all the Ridicule of Fools. They are too ſolemn & awful to be trifled with; and too important to be always excluded. They come home to every Man's Boſom, and are intitled to every Man's higheſt Attention. Let us, therefore, regard them as becomes reaſonable and moral Creatures, and they will prove effectual Antidotes to the "evil Communications" of petulant Scoffers. When Vice and Folly ariſe to tempt us under flattering Forms, let the ſerious Character which we bear as Men come alſo forward to View; and let the ſolemn Admonitions (with which I ſhall conclude) ſound full in our Ears, "My Son, if Sinners intice thee, conſent thou not. Come out from amongſt them, and be ſeparate. Remember thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth. Fear the Lord, and depart from Evil." For, "The Way of Life is above to the Wiſe; and he that keepeth the Commandments, keepeth his own Soul."

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLVII.

Good Company, great Importance of it.

Prov. xiii. 20. "He that walketh with wiſe Men "ſhall be wiſe: but a Companion of Fools ſhall "be deſtroyed."

That the Temper, the Sentiments, the Morality, and, in general, the whole Conduct and Figure of Men, is influenced by the Example and Diſpoſition of thoſe they converſe with, is a Reflection which has long ſince paſſed into Proverbs, and been ranked among the ſtanding Maxims of human Wiſdom, in all Ages and Nations of the World. And Mankind ſeem to act with Conviction enough of this Truth, in the Care they take to deter thoſe whoſe Welfare they are concerned for from the Company of ſuch, the Expence or Infamy of whoſe Vices may endanger their Fortunes or Reputation. But becauſe the Generality of Men appear much leſs ſolicitous for the purely religious Conſequences of Converſation, it is here deſigned to recommend to your Conſideration, this Maxim of Solomon,

lomon, both as it is itſelf a Part of Religion, and an effectual Method to ſecure us in the true Profeſſion, and encourage and improve us in the Practice of it. "He that walketh with wiſe Men ſhall be wiſe; but a Companion of Fools ſhall be deſtroyed."

There is nothing obſcure in the Text; I am only to mind you, that Wiſdom and Goodneſs, Folly and Sin, are Terms equivalent in the Language of the Scripture, and particularly of this Book of Proverbs: and that to make up the Antitheſis or Oppoſition between the two Parts of this Verſe, entire and full, we muſt read it thus; "He that keeps Company with the Virtuous and Good, will himſelf be virtuous and happy: but he that keeps Company with the Vicious, will be vicious and miſerable." — The Text, then, contains theſe two Propoſitions:

First, The Advantages which will attend our converſing with wiſe and good Men. "He that walketh with wiſe Men ſhall be wiſe." And,

Secondly, The Dangers and Inconveniencies we are expoſed to by a contrary Conduct, by being engaged in Familiarities with the Wicked: "But a Companion of Fools ſhall be deſtroyed." And,

First, Our aſſociating with wiſe and good Men is an Evidence of our own Virtue: for it will always be preſumed, that Men aſſemble with Perſons of like Diſpoſitions

positions with themſelves. It cannot well be imagined, how Friendſhip can long ſubſiſt between oppoſite Tempers and Inclinations: when Men are ſo widely different in their Sentiments and Principles, in their Purſuits and Averſions, as the Good and the Vicious; it is impoſſible but they muſt ſoon grow burdenſome and uneaſy to one another; thoſe things which are the Mirth and Pleaſure of the One, provoke the Indignation and Abhorrence of the Other; and under theſe conſtant Occaſions of Diſaſter, Familiarity muſt grow cold, and each be inclined to ſeek his Entertainment in more agreeable Company (*); and accordingly it is found in Fact and Experience, that the Sentiments and Inclinations, the Virtues and Vices of Men, are what range and ſort out Mankind into their ſeveral Societies. It will therefore be always, and with Reaſon, concluded, that he who aſſociates with wicked Men, is himſelf of the ſame Character.

Whatever Virtues may appear in him, they will be eſteemed an hypocritical Impoſture on the World; and in his more retired Pleaſures, he will be preſumed as much a Libertine as the reſt of his Company; and conſequently, we can by no other Conduct avoid this Appearance of evil, and preſerve the Reputation of our Virtue, but by confining our Converſations to good Men. — This Argument, which diſſuades an Intimacy with

(*) See Wiſ. ii. 15. Serm. CCCXLVII.

with wicked Men from its Effect on our Reputation, may perhaps ſeem rather prudential than religious. But if we reflect what Offence we give to many weak Men, by ſuch a Conduct, that it unqualifies us for the Inſtruction or Reproof of others; that it corrupts our Example, and gives Countenance to the Vicious and Profane, we ſhall be convinced that this Motive is properly Chriſtian, and ought to be regarded from Conſiderations of great Importance to Religion. — But,

Secondly, Our aſſociating ourſelves with good Men, is not only a Proof and Evidence of our Virtue, but the moſt effectual Method both to retain and improve it.

Our Advantage from the Converſation of good Men may be conſidered more particularly with Reſpect to their Diſcourſe, and their Example. "The Mind of the Righteous (ſays the Pſalmiſt) will be exerciſed in Wiſdom, his Mouth will be talking of Judgment." From him we ſhall learn, and by juſt Arguments be confirmed in true Principles of Faith and Morality; the Maxims that govern his Conduct are ſuch as equally tend to promote private and public Happineſs; and even his Mirth is bounded by Innocence and Purity; and the Senſe of his own Duty will engage him to cultivate the ſame juſt Sentiments and good Diſpoſitions in thoſe he converſes with. — In a Word,

What

What Light, what Strength, what Pleaſure does it miniſter? How does it awaken the Conſcience, and purify the Heart? How does it quicken us when we languiſh? and recall and reduce us, when we begin to forget ourſelves, and kindle in us wiſe Deſires, and holy Purpoſes? inſtructing our Ignorance, and reforming our Errors.

Certainly therefore, That Man has a very mean and low Notion of Friendſhip, who propoſes no other End than to eat and to drink together, or to laugh and fool away our precious Moments. The Scripture points out to us much nobler Purpoſes and Deſigns of Converſation, when it tells us, that "The Lips of the Wiſe diſperſe Knowledge," that our Speech ſhould be ſuch "as may adminiſter Grace to the Hearers;" that we ſhould "build up one another in our holy Faith;" that we ſhould "comfort one another and exhort one another continually, and ſo much the more, becauſe the Day approaches," &c. And ſurely we are ſtrangely miſtaken, if we think that our Communication will loſe all Guſt by being directed to One of theſe Ends. On the Contrary, it would doubtleſs be as much more delightful as beneficial, if when we meet we were accuſtomed, inſtead of Cenſures and Reflections, News and Impertinence, or Frothineſs & Lightneſs, to diſcourſe of ſome worthy and noble Subject,

becoming the Genius and Hope of a Chriſtian. The Example of David confirms this Notion; he tried and found that Friendſhip was both uſeful and pleaſant, while it was maintained on the Stock of Religion: "My Companion, my Guide, my familiar Friend; we took ſweet Counſel together, and walked in the Houſe of God as Friends."

The Diſciples going to Emmaus, remark what Life and Spirit there was in the Converſation of our Lord, "Did not our Hearts burn within us (ſaid they) while he talked to us on the Way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And though no Words can ever be impregnated with the ſame Force and Energy with which our Lord's were; yet, certainly, when God, and our great Mediator, when the Riches of divine Grace, when Righteouſneſs and Heaven are the Subject of our Diſcourſe, when our Language flows from the Heart, and is animated by a vital and experimental Senſe of that we talk of, when it has all the Advantages which a true Friendſhip and known Integrity and the moſt favourable Opportunities can give it, ſuch Diſcourſe can never fail of moving and affecting us. (*)

Perhaps, indeed, the gentle Admonitions wherewith good Men will rebuke the Imperfections of their Friends, may be uneaſy to the Pride of ſome Tempers; but theſe "precious Balms" (as the Pſalmiſt calls them)

(*) See the Note, Vol. viii. Page 330.

are

are Freedoms which wiſe & virtuous Men will eſteem rather Favours than Affronts.

Holy David, tho a Prince, was ſenſible that his Failings and Miſcarriages would make this Conſequence inſeparable from his chooſing the Society of good Men, but yet, rather than he would take refuge with the Men that wrought Wickedneſs, he makes it his Requeſt to God, that "the Righteous ſhould ſmite him friendly, and reprove him." And indeed there is no ſurer Argument of a good Underſtanding, and a Chriſtian Diſpoſition, than being ſenſible of the Friendſhip of a proper Reproof. (*)

But the Inſtructions and Reproofs of good Men, can hardly fail of theſe beneficial Effects on thoſe who converſe with them, when we conſider how they are enforced by a correſpondent Example. — When we find a Man preſcribe nothing to us, but his own conſtant Practice, we can have no Suſpicion of Diſguiſe or Inſincerity. In Him we have a Demonſtration of the Truth and Power of Religion, and can no longer imagine that Faith is a mere Speculation or Amuſement, or Virtue a mere Pretence or Name. A good Man is himſelf what he deſires us to be; and therefore gives us the greateſt Security that he intends our Happineſs

(*) See Arguments and Rules in both theſe Caſes, ſeparately, on Converſation, in Vol. viii. Page 301, &c.—and on Reproof, in Page 113, &c. of this Volume.

pineſs in the Methods of Life he adviſes, ſince he purſues his own by the ſame.

Example is confeſſed to have this Advantage over all other Methods of Inſtruction, that it not only teaches us our Duty; but convinces us of the Poſſibility of our Imitation, and excites us to it.

Whatever is poſſible to other Men, is poſſible to us too; for they are clad with the ſame Frailties and Paſſions, they are expoſed to the ſame Temptations, and have no other Aſſiſtances than we have, or may have.

When we ſee ſuch Men going before us in the Paths of Duty, it confutes all idle Pretences of Impoſſibility; it reproaches our Imperfections; and if we have any thing generous in our Temper, it ſhames us into Emulation. — Under theſe Convictions we ſhall either come to a Reſolution ourſelves to do our Duty, or ſhall ſuffer the daily Reproaches of our own Minds.

This is the natural Influence of Example; it inſtructs, it reproves, it exhorts; and if it do not prevail, it condemns.

Will not our own Hearts be apt to reaſon thus with us on every Reflection we make on the Virtues of our Friend? — What am I doing? Can He and I go to the ſame Place at laſt? He purſues a Crown by Works of Faith, and can I obtain it by Works of Darkneſs? He ſeeks a Heaven by the Labour of Love,

and

and the Patience of Hope; and can I gain it by Sloth and Idleneſs, by Senſuality and Looſeneſs? He mortifies the Body, while I indulge it; He prays and contends, and paſſes his Life in holy Fear, while I am careleſs and unconcerned about a future State. His Conduct is regular, his Diſcourſe heavenly, and the Bent of his Soul is towards that which is good; but how little do I mind theſe things! How hard is it for me not to let him ſee that I am wholly ſet upon the Pleaſures & Profits of this World! What do I mean? Am I indeed in the right, and He in the wrong? Is Religion, indeed, but a well, cunningly-deviſed Fable? Alas! I ſee the contrary. I ſee there is Truth and Reaſon on his Side; I cannot but reverence him, and think him happy; cannot but own that he follows his Reaſon, I my Luſt and Fancy.

How uneaſy theſe Kind of Soliloquies muſt be, and how naturally they will end, either in the reforming our Follies, or in breaking-off and quitting a Converſation which gives us ſo much Trouble, we cannot but ſee. — Nay,

We would obſerve further, that the Example of a good Man is, generally ſpeaking, the beſt Direction we can follow in the Performance of our Duty.

The moſt exact Rules and Precepts are ſubject to be miſunderſtood; ſome Capacities, at leaſt, will miſ-

take their Meaning; and tho' they ſincerely endeavour to obey, will act far from the Intention of thoſe who delivered them: But the Example of a wiſe and good Man aſcertains the Senſe of the Precept, and ſhews plainly how it is to be obeyed: and the meaneſt Capacity, when he ſees a Rule practicably applied before his Eyes, can no longer be at a Loſs how it is to be performed.

It may be obſerved alſo under this Head, that Self-love is a very partial Interpreter. We are apt to be fond of our Opinions and Practice, and perhaps without perceiving it, to bend and accommodate the Rule in Favour to them: but when we apply it to the Actions of other Men, we judge with leſs Intereſt, and conſequently with more Impartiality; whence it often happens that the Notions of Duty which we form from the Example of others, is more correct and juſt than we derive from the Rule itſelf.

To theſe Advantages of converſing with good Examples, we muſt add One which, doubtleſs, is ſtill greater, [viz] the Encouragement we receive in the Performance of our Duty. The Shame of being ſingular is a Weakneſs which has corrupted the beſt and moſt ingenious Diſpoſitions; but now by a conſtant View of good Examples, we find that we are not alone, that we have Numbers enough on our Side, to countenance

us

us in our Profeſſion; and eſpecially when we ſee wiſe Men, (Perſons of Character and Eſteem,) Examples of Duty, we are convinced that Piety is no unreputable Qualification, and that we need not be aſhamed of our Virtue; it will confirm our Reſolutions againſt the Railleries or Reproaches of the Profane, and give us Courage and Confidence in our Religion.

I might further recommend the Converſation of good Men to our Choice, from Reaſons of Prudence and Diſcretion. As that while we confine our Intercourſe to Perſons of this Character, we are in no Danger of Treachery in our Friendſhips, of Fraud or Injuſtice in our Commerce: — we have a Security firmer than that of Bonds and Covenants, in their Conſcience and Integrity: — we are aſſured of a ready Aſſiſtance in all our Exigencies, from a Conviction of their own Duty: — we have the Satisfaction of converſing with Men whoſe Paſſions are under Government and Diſcipline; not to be affronted with Trifles, nor provoked to any unreaſonable Reſentment; difficultly moved, and eaſily appeaſed; Men who are juſt and good-natured out of Principle, in whoſe Converſation we are ſecured from the Slanders of the malicious, the Envy of the ſpiteful, the Cenſures of the impertinent, and the Contempt of the proud: and in general, ſince ſo great a Part of the Uneaſineſs we com-

plain of in this World is derived on us by the Wickedneſs and Paſſions of unrighteous Men, we can by no Conduct more probably ſecure our Happineſs, than by confining our Intercourſe to Men of Virtue and Religion. But,

Secondly, I am to repreſent the Dangers and Inconveniencies we expoſe ourſelves to, by being Companions of wicked Men. "But a Companion of Fools ſhall be deſtroyed."

By being "a Companion of Fools," we muſt naturally underſtand the not indulging ourſelves in any Confidence or Familiarity, with impious and profane Men; but eſpecially not to communicate with them in their Vices, nor to concur in any unjuſt, irreligious, or unmerciful Action, and, as far as it is in our Power, to avoid all Intercourſe with them, and, (as the Apoſtle commands) "from ſuch to withdraw ourſelves."

Not that we can imagine ourſelves prohibited all Manner of Converſation with wicked Men, for this would exclude us from performing the charitable Offices of private Admonition or Inſtruction, the moſt ſucceſsful & almoſt the only Method we can take for their Reformation. Perſons of that Character generally keep themſelves out of the Reach of the public Reproofs and Exhortations of the Miniſtry, or hear with ſuch Inattention or Contempt, as renders them of very little Ef-

fect

ſelf to them, and conſequently will either not be applied to at all, or, if at all, yet without much Hopes of Succeſs; unleſs we are permitted ſo far to converſe with them as the Diſcharge of this Office requires.

But ſince the Prepoſſeſſions theſe Sort of Men have generally conceived againſt the Miniſtry, give other good Chriſtians, againſt whom they are leſs prejudiced, greater Probabilities of Succeſs with them, it is to be hoped they will think themſelves not only permitted, but obliged to this Sort of Friendſhip and Converſation with them. But,

It is further to be conſidered, in Abatement of this Reſtraint, that the great Mixture there is in the Buſineſs and Affairs of Life, the Nearneſs of Relation, or our Acquaintance with ſuch Perſons as may have theſe Occaſions of Correſpondence with wicked Men, will ſometimes engage us in neceſſary, and frequently in accidental Converſations with them. But theſe we cannot reprove as criminal, becauſe they are altogether unavoidable. If we would abſolutely decline the Wicked, we muſt abandon human Society, muſt retire into a Deſert, and, as the Apoſtle ſays, "go out of the World."

What we are forbid, therefore, is receiving ſuch Perſons into our Confidence and Intimacies, chooſing their Alliance for our Friendſhips, or their Company for

the ordinary Entertainments of Converſation; theſe are Acts of Choice, and our own free Election; and to theſe, therefore, it is reaſonable the Prohibition ſhould extend. And even with Regard to That unavoidable Correſpondence with wicked Men, to which the Buſineſs or Accidents of the World may ſometimes oblige us, we are certainly under thus much Reſtraint, not to enter into any further Familiarity than the Occaſion requires, and to take care of our Behaviour under them, leſt we countenance the Sin, while we careſs the Sinner.

But I muſt obſerve one Inſtance, in which we are reſtrained from joining with wicked Men, even in ſuch Offices of common Life and civil Intercourſe, which might otherwiſe be indifferent and allowable; and that is, when the Perſon is judicially ſeparated from the Communion of the Church; with ſuch an One it is the Apoſtle's expreſs Command "no not to eat;" and the Reaſons of this Prohibition are very obvious, becauſe the Deſign of this Sentence will in a great Meaſure be defeated, unleſs the whole Congregation concurs in the Execution of it; for neither will the Sinner be reclaimed, nor others deterred from the like Commiſſions, nor the Infection of the Flock be prevented, if the Criminal be permitted the ſame Freedom and Correſpondence with Chriſtians, as before; his

his Puniſhment will have no outward Effect that can lead him to reflect on his Sin; and when he meets with the ſame Countenance and Friendſhip from the reſt of the World as formerly, both he, and thoſe he converſes with, will be encouraged to deſpiſe the Authority that inflicted it: and it is plain, that under the Advantage of ſuch a Reception, he has juſt the ſame Opportunity of corrupting others, as he had before.

It may perhaps be imagined, that his Excluſion from the Ordinances of Religion will anſwer all theſe Purpoſes; but firſt, as to his corrupting others, unleſs he be depoſed from ſome public Office in the Church, he is by this Part of his Sentence deprived of no Opportunity he had before: ſecondly, as to himſelf, if he be a hardened Sinner, as it muſt be ſuppoſed he is whom private and more gentle Applications could not reclaim, this Sentence only excludes him from what he had very little Regard for before; or, if his Crime was Schiſm or Hereſy, his Puniſhment is no more than he voluntarily choſe.

Now nothing can affect him in the Nature of a Puniſhment, but what deprives him of ſomething he eſteems and values, and the Loſs of which will render him uneaſy. When therefore he finds himſelf avoided and neglected by his Familiars, This affects him with a Penalty the moſt ſenſible to human Nature: This, if

he has any Principle of Shame left in him, will awaken him to more ſerious Thoughts of his Condition, and give ſuch Conſiderations as are properly religious a more eaſy Acceſs, and a more lively Impreſſion on his Mind.

It is therefore, we ſay, not only an Obedience which we owe to the Authority of our Superiors, and the expreſs Command of an Apoſtle, in Support of that Authority, but a Charity which is due from us to the Souls of our Brethren, thus to reſtrain our Converſation from an excommunicated Perſon, and by ſuch a Behaviour as will expreſs Abhorrence and Deteſtation of his Crime; both deter others from the like Commiſſions, and humble him to ſuch a Senſe of his Guilt as will lead him to Repentance, and ſave his Spirit in the Day of the Lord Jeſus.

The Meaſure of our Acquaintance or Familiarity thus limited, I proceed to the more immediate ill Conſequences naturally attending a Correſpondence and Familiarity with wicked Men. And here,

This Subject, after what we have already in general ſaid, (*) does not require long inſiſting on. Daily Experience is too plain, too ſad a Proof of this Truth, that Sin is infectious: that human Nature is ſo prone to Evil, that it needs very little Temptation or Encouragement to it; that ill Principles and Practices are ſoon

(*) In the preceding Subject.

ſoon propagated, and if they find any Countenance and Approbation from thoſe we converſe with, will eaſily bear down all the Oppoſition which the Modeſty of a civil Education, the weak Impreſſions of Reputation or Decency, can raiſe againſt them; nay Holineſs itſelf, unleſs well-grown, and deeply rooted, can ſcarcely reſiſt the Contagion which ill Company ſpreads.

But we ſhall be more ſenſible of the pernicious Effects of ill Company, if we conſider theſe two or three Things.

1ſt. Sin is the Cement of the Friendſhips and Intimacies of Sinners; Vice is the Subject of their Converſation, and ſome Senſuality or other makes-up their Diverſion and Entertainment. And how can it be otherwiſe? "Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth ſpeaketh." And what can the Mouth utter but Sin and Folly, when the Heart is full of Rottenneſs and Corruption, is full of Luſt, of Pride, Envy, Ambition, Soulſhneſs, or Vanity? What but polluted Streams can flow from ſuch polluted Fountains? what but Evil, can an evil Man bring-forth out of the "evil Treaſure of his Heart?" How hard is it then, even for a good Man, to maintain the Charity and Dignity of his Mind, where Cenſures and Slanders, where malicious Wit, or Trifling and Impertinence, make up the Converſation? How hard is it even for ſuch a

One to preſerve the Purity and Sobriety of his Mind; where Riot and Luxury is the Buſineſs they meet on, where Pride and Oſtentation of Life is the only thing admired; and nothing has any Favour in it, that is wiſe or good, devout or humble. And if a virtuous Perſon can, in ſuch Company, ſcarcely keep his Ground, how eaſily are thoſe born away by the Stream, who are, of themſelves, but too prone to evil, and too fond of Temptation? — But,

2dly, Ill Company does naturally inſtil and propagate vicious Principles, worldly Maxims, ſenſual, and carnal Improvements.

Here we are furniſhed with Objections againſt God and Providence, with Excuſes and Apologies for Sin; here we learn to ridicule Religion and Conſcience, and diſpute ourſelves out of all Senſe and Duty.

And at this Day, thoſe Errors which eat like a Canker, and conſume every thing that is wiſe and ſerious in us, have multiplied ſo beyond Meaſure, that they are no longer the Encloſure of ſome few Pretenders to Freedom and Reaſon, but the fooliſheſt and meaneſt, as well as the moſt vicious Part of Mankind, are deeply tinged with them. But,

3dly, Ill Company creates Confidence in Sin. Intimacy and Familiarity with bad Men give them Opportunities to offer thoſe Trials to our Virtue, which no wiſe

wise Man should ever hazard. A wicked Companion watches our unguarded Moments, and falls upon us by Surprize, when we are in no Preparation to make our Defence. When the Heart is made merry with Wine, when the Mind lays aside its Severity, and is worked up into a gay and easy Posture by Wit and Raillery; then every thing comes unsuspected, & passes without Scrutiny. And then perhaps it is that we are at first enticed to commit actual Sin; which these Artists know how to represent in some softening Light, to those who cannot yet bear a direct Attack upon their religious Principles. This Beginning to talk unconcernedly and loosely, naturally makes way for Carelessness and Liberty in our Actions; and if we repeat them often, we shall soon grow bold and stupid in Sin: for if we neglect to make any Reflection upon our Words and Actions; we shall be insensibly betrayed into a Hardness of Heart; or if (what is worse) we be driven by the Reproaches of our Conscience upon Reflection, to take Sanctuary in the Deceits and Impostures, whether vulgar or more refined, which Sinners are wont to put upon themselves, we shall soon sink into Prophaneness and Atheism.

If then our Virtue and Integrity have so close a Dependence on the Choice of our Friends & Familiars; if the Society of good Men be so necessary to direct

and confirm us in Duty, and the Converſation of wicked Men ſo deſtructive of our Principles and Morality; as we value the Favour of God and good Men here, and the ineſtimable Rewards of Duty hereafter, let us with our utmoſt Care make the important Choice as it becomes us.

This Caution indeed was always neceſſary, even in the pureſt and moſt virtuous Ages; but it becomes us to recommend it with more than ordinary Warmth and Concern, when the Numbers, the Figure, and the Inſolence of wicked Men have almoſt eſtabliſhed Sin as a Faſhion; when every Enemy of Religion appears openly and undiſguiſed; when Infidelity, Schiſm, and Hereſy, are eſteemed Arguments of good Senſe and a ſuperior Underſtanding, and Vice and Profaneneſs are the polite Entertainments of the World.

So melancholy a Proſpect ſhould inſpire us with more than ordinary Zeal to oppoſe ſome Stop to the the riſing Torrent, and check this Overflowing of Ungodlineſs; and, as the moſt effectual Remedy that can be applied, to deter others, and withdraw ourſelves from the Converſation of wicked Men.

By This alone we ſhall be able to fix a Mark of Shame and Ignominy on Vice, and recover the juſt Honour and Eſteem of Virtue.

Thanks be to God, the World is not yet ſo bad, that we

we need fear a Solitude from the Practice; "The Righteous are not so failed from the Earth," but we may still find Men of Virtue and Piety enough for the Intimacies of Friendship, and the Entertainments of Converſation: or whatever we may want in the Numbers of our Acquaintance will be abundantly made up to us in their Value. Nay, even this Complaint will every Day leſſen upon our Hands; the Credit and Honour we ſhall retrieve to Virtue by this Conduct, will irreſiſtibly gain it Converts, and we ſhall have at the ſame Time the Satisfaction of making and enjoying good Men.

To Conclude: Men may flatter themſelves as they pleaſe, and delude themſelves with vain Words; they may call the Proud and Rich happy; they may admire the proſperous Sinner, and, in a ſenſeleſs Fit, applaud themſelves in their vicious Pleaſures; but they muſt bid Defiance, not only to Revelation, but even Reaſon and Experience too, e're they can promiſe themſelves a true and laſting Satisfaction in any thing but Virtue. Revelation tells us plainly, that "Godlineſs," and that only, "has the Promiſes of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come." That "if we ſow to the Fleſh, we ſhall of the Fleſh reap Corruption; but if through the Spirit we mortify the Deeds of the Body, we ſhall live." That "we muſt all appear before the

Judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, that we may receive according to what we have done in the Body, whether it be good or evil." And both Reaſon and Experience, as well as Revelation, tell us, that Sin is fruitleſs and diſhonourable, and reſtleſs: That the Miſeries and Calamities of Life ſpring from Sin; that Sin blaſts our Enjoyments and Poſſeſſions; that it gives a Sting and Edge to all our Miſeries and Misfortunes: for if we did not doat upon the Body and the World, the Evils of Life could not wound us ſo deeply.

Let neither, then, the Power nor Quality of the Great, or the Wit of the Pleaſant; let neither Intereſt, Vanity, nor Fear prevail with us, to court the Favour, to flatter the Vices, or applaud the Profaneneſs of wicked Men. Virtue and Religion, Heaven, and eternal Happineſs, are not Trifles to be given-up in a Compliment, or ſacrificed to a Jeſt. And if we are either aſhamed or afraid to aſſert the Cauſe of Religion, and give Countenance to the Servants of Chriſt here, of us ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, before his Father and the holy Angels.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLVIII.

The Chriſtian Character.
Arguments to ſupport it.
(in Suppliment to the preceding Diſcourſes on good and bad Company.)

Ephe. iv. 1. "Walk worthy of the Vocation where-
"with ye are called,"

Many (and ſome indeed who profeſs themſelves underſtanding in the true End of Living) have repreſented human Life as a dull Round of inſignificant Follies; which, however entertaining when new, yet by frequent Repetitions, at laſt becomes perfectly tedious.

The Conſequence of which has been, that many, viewing it in this diſagreeable Light, have been unconcerned further than juſt to remedy, or remove ſuch Inconvenencies, as the common Accidents of Life may occaſionally produce. — It is true:

That the Lives but of too many have been but one barren Circle of inſignificant Actions; yet it doth not from hence follow that Men have ever Occaſion to make it ſo; — It is ſo indeed to Brute Beaſts; but Man

is

is endued with nobler Faculties, and preſented with higher Objects, on which to exerciſe and employ them, anſwerable to his diſtinguiſhed and peculiar Calling. Nothing can bound the extenſive Range of Reaſon, ever improving, and ever improveable: nothing can deaden the Pleaſures of Virtue and the Ardour of the Affections to Goodneſs, which, the more they are taſted, the more they are deſireable. Here is a noble Path for a rational Creature to travel in; and his continued Advancement in it, in Knowledge, in Virtue, and Goodneſs, will conſtitute his higheſt Perfection here, and terminate in a perfect Conſummation of endleſs Bliſs and Glory hereafter.

As God, therefore, hath given us ſuch Faculties, and preſented ſuch noble Objects before us; as He hath brought us out of the Darkneſs of Irreligion, into the Light of his glorious Goſpel, we ſhould "walk as Children of Light," and "worthy the Vocation wherewith we are called;" and "all falſe Ways we ſhould utterly abhor." — We profeſs a pure Religion and holy, as our Vocation and Calling; our Lives therefore ought to bear ſome Reſemblance to it. — But,

It is unpleaſing to remark, how few of the Number who profeſs the Faith of Chriſt, and bear the Name of Chriſtian, fulfill the ſacred Obligations of that Faith, or live agreeably to the Truth & Importance of That

Name.

Name. Yet nothing can be more certain, than that the Profeſſion of a Faith, and the bearing a Name, without a correſpondent Life and Actions, will be worſe than unavailing—will be pernicious and fatal! for, it is not the being gilded over with the external Profeſſion of Chriſtianity that will avail us: our Religion, (in Order to have its due Effect,) muſt be a vital Principle, inwardly to change and transform us.

For a Man to be a Chriſtian in Name only; to own Chriſt for his Lord, and not to do the things that He ſaith; to profeſs the Goſpel for his Rule, and yet to live "like the Gentiles who know not God, nor the Goſpel of his Son;" is ſo inconſiſtent and unreaſonable as not to admit of an Apology.(*)

Would Chriſtians but ſeriouſly examine what the Nature of their Profeſſion is, they would need no further Motives to induce them to live worthy of it.

To aſſiſt Men, therefore, in making theſe Inquiries, and properly to apply them, I ſhall,

Firſt, Conſider our Vocation in general, and ſhew what Obligation that lays upon us:

Secondly, Add ſome Particulars which may enforce the general Obſervation. — And then, 3dly,

(*) *CHRISTIAN* is the higheſt Style of Man: tho' the Name is of little Conſequence without it be accompanied by thoſe intereſting Qualities it holds out and contains. To be called a *CHRISTIAN*, and really to be One, in the preſent Days, are, too evidently, very different things. Serm. CCCXLVIII.

3dly, Duly & properly enforce the Whole. — And,

First, There never was any Institution in the World so perfectly calculated to reform the Lives and Manners of Men, as That of the Christian; wherein we have all things laid before us, that are "requisite to Life and Godliness," all things that are necessary "to make the Man of God," (i.e) every Good Christian, "perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto every good Work."

Our blessed Saviour, the wise and potent Lawgiver, "who was a Teacher sent from God" to instruct us in "the things that belong to our Peace," hath not only adopted into his Religion all the excellent Sayings, and Maxims of Life, which were ever in Esteem among the wisest of the Sons of Men, but hath also added to them, things beyond their finding out, and enforced them with higher Motives, and upon stronger Considerations. Insomuch, that the Christian Religion is truly stiled "a Mystery of Godliness," because nothing can be more evident, than the Tendency of every Part of it to make Men holy and happy, to root out Sin, and Wickedness, and to implant, in their Stead, the most perfect Purity and Righteousness. — Now,

What Sort of Life doth so clear, so excellent a Discovery of God's Will, for the Salvation of Mankind by Jesus Christ, require of all those who have the Knowledge of it? How

How ſhould they live who are called from Darkneſs to Light; from Ignorance of God and themſelves, to a plain and clear Knowledge of his Will; from the Bondage of Death, to a certain Hope of a glorious Immortality; from a profane and impious Worſhip, to an holy, pure, and reaſonable Service?

Ought they not to be more exact and regular in their Lives; more careful to approve themſelves to God, more ſtudious of his Will; more zealous and induſtrious in his Service than other Men, who have not theſe Means, nor theſe Privileges of Mercy? – ſurely they ought. (*)

There was ſomething to be ſaid for Men who lived in Heathen Darkneſs, who had no other Guide but the mere Light of Nature, and, that too, generally darkened and obſcured by an univerſal Degeneracy of Manners. (‡) "The Times of this Ignorance, God might be ſuppoſed to wink at."

There was ſomething alſo to be ſaid in Excuſe for thoſe

(*) Nothing is more unnatural, or of greater Deformity, than that an intelligent Agent ſhould have the Truth of Things in his Mind, and that it ſhould not give Law and Rule to his Life and Converſation.

(‡) *Ducere quo vellet, fuit hæc Sapientia quondam.*
Jn Tenebris ambulans Pedes offendit, in Errorem ſequitur.
Serm. CCCXLVIII.

thoſe who lived a worldly and ſenſual Life under the Jewiſh Diſpenſation; who, though they were in Covenant with God, and had His Laws and Promiſes; yet, both theſe being, in Appearance, of an earthly, temporal Nature, and, in a Manner, relating only to the things of this Life, it was not eaſy for them to raiſe their Minds above this World.

But for Us, who are under the Chriſtian Diſpenſation; who have been inſtructed in the whole Will of God; who have the ſtrongeſt Demonſtrations of another Life after this; the moſt explicit Promiſes that we ſhall be Partakers of it, if we obey God's Laws; We, who have the plaineſt Rules to direct us in our Obedience, laid before us with ſo much Clearneſs of Evidence, that even Ignorance itſelf is left without Excuſe: We, who have the whole laid before us, (*) with ſuch convincing Proofs, from its Purity and Suitableneſs to our Natures, from Miracles, and other Atteſtations, that Infidelity is no leſs a Crime than its own Confuſion; what can be ſaid for Us, if, after theſe great Opportunities put into our Hands of entering into God's everlaſting Reſt, any of us ſhould fall ſhort thro Diſobedience or Unbelief? (‡) This

(*) See the 6th Article of Religion.

(‡) The Guilt of any Crime is to be meaſured, not barely by the Quality of the Fact alone, but by the ſeveral Aggravations attending it; and, not here to deſcend to the particular Conſideration of ſuch

This being the Caſe of the Chriſtian Religion; This the happy and glorious Vocation to which we are called by our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, what Obligations do we lie under, above all the reſt of Mankind, to be ſerious in the Service of it, to be pure and unblameable in our Lives, and to "abound in all the Fruits of Righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt to the Praiſe and Glory of God!" — "What Manner of Men ought we to be in all holy Converſation and Godlineſs;"

ſuch Circumſtances, it is evident, the more of Knowledge and Wilfulneſs and Ingratitude appears in the Offender, the more heinous is the Crime, and the heavier Condemnation is to be expected.

The Jews, indeed, were very highly favoured of the Lord; upon which Account, the Advantages of their Condition were ſo many Aggravations of their Crime. But,

There is (we hope) no need of taking Pains to prove that the Advantages of the Chriſtian are, in every Reſpect, far ſuperior to any that the Jewiſh Church could boaſt of. And! What ſhould the Conſequence of theſe Pre-eminences be, but a deeper Senſe of Gratitude, and, in that Senſe, a more punctual, and cheerful, and ſteady Obedience? Or, if this be not the Conſequence, muſt it not be, that the Heinouſneſs of our Guilt, by behaving ourſelves otherwiſe, (i.e) wickedly and unworthily, will certainly riſe, in Proportion to the Bleſſings we ſlight and abuſe.

Immoral Chriſtians are apt to pity the State of ignorant Heathens; But, (as our Saviour ſaid upon another Occaſion, ſo may we here,) "Weep not for them, but weep for yourſelves." It will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for an honeſt Heathen, or conſcientious Jew, than for a wicked Chriſtian, who hath ſinned under clearer Light, and under greater Advantages. Serm. 348

lineſs;" vowing all holy Obedience to ſo holy a Religion, that we may become pure, even as the Religion that we profeſs, which is our Calling, is pure.

Thus, in the general, we eaſily perceive what great Obligations are laid upon us Chriſtians, above all Men, to lead holy, pure, and virtuous Lives; and how unworthy we are of That ſacred Name, if we act inconſiſtently to it. — But, Of This we ſhall be more convinced, if we conſider what has been done for us, or promiſed by us, on taking this Calling upon ourſelves: which brings me,

Secondly, To obſerve ſome Particulars, in Order to enforce the general Obſervation. — And,

Firſt, Every particular Mercy of God requires a ſuitable Return of living to his Glory; more eſpecially we are obliged to a proper Demeanour in our Chriſtian Calling, when we conſider the infinite Kindneſs of the Son of God in reſcuing us from Deſtruction, redeeming us from Wrath, and from the inſupportable Vengeance of eternal Miſery, which our Sins had juſtly deſerved; and This, at no leſs a Price than the ſhedding of his own moſt precious Blood.

"What ſhall we ſay, then," when we conſider this amazing Act of God's Kindneſs to us? "Shall we continue in Sin that Grace may abound? God forbid!" Nay, rather, "Let us caſt away every Sin, the Sins which

which do so easily beset us, and let us run with Patience the Race that is set before us," and "perfect Holiness in the Fear of God;" for, "consider how great things He hath done for us."

Whoever has any Sense of Ingenuity, cannot but look upon this astonishing Kindness of our Lord, as the greatest Obligation that could possibly be laid upon us, utterly to renounce all Sin and Wickedness whatever. — Again,

Secondly, Being in our Christian Calling dedicated, solemnly dedicated to God by Baptism, therein publickly professing to "renounce the Devil and all his Works, the Vanities of the World, and all the Lusts of the Flesh," what Conversation in This Case becomes us?

This Engagement, which was first made for us before we were sensible of it's Importance, we have since, it must be supposed, (such of us, at least, as are arrived at the Age of Manhood,) made our own, by a particular and formal Act, taking the baptismal Vow upon our own Souls. — At the Lord's Table also, we present unto God "ourselves, our Souls and Bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and lively Sacrifice unto him." Nay, by barely joining with the Congregation in the common Christian Worship, we shew to what Religion we belong, and tacitly, or rather with our own Lips we openly lay-claim to the Blessings, and acknowledge the Ob-

ligations of Chriſtianity. Thus are the Vows of God upon us all.

Truly, therefore, we cannot here, without the greateſt Guilt, allow ourſelves in any known or open Courſe of wilful Sin, whatever it may be.

Being thus devoted to God, we ſhall be falſe to our Engagements if we do not make His Service the chief Buſineſs, Care, and Deſign of our Lives. (*)

But further, — What Kind of Life ſhould That Man lead who is called into the neareſt Relation to God, and "from a Child of Wrath," and Slave of Satan, is made the Son of God, the Brother of our Lord, and Joint-heir with Him of the Inheritance of the

(*) The being made Members of Chriſt by Baptiſm, is but of little Service to thoſe who do not comply with the Terms of it.

Charity, indeed, will always think the beſt; and we muſt wiſh and hope for the *internal* Efficacy, where there are the *outward* Means of Grace. But what will it profit to hang upon the Vine, an unprofitable Branch, whoſe End is to be caſt away, and burned? or to be found in the Net, when at the ſame Time that the Good are "gathered into Veſſels, the Bad will be caſt away?" or, how are the Tares the better for ſtanding with the Wheat, or the Chaff for lying among the Corn at preſent, when a Day of Separation is coming; and One who cannot be deceived with Forms and falſe Appearances, ſhall ſeparate the one from the other; "gather the Grain into his Garner, and burn up the Chaff with unquenchable Fire?"

Let us not, therefore, ſuppoſe that the Wicked, tho' in Profeſſion, Members of Chriſt's viſible Church, are yet, in Truth, Members of his myſtical Body.

the Kingdom of Heaven? Certainly, a Person who is thus dignified, ought to have a Soul raised above the things of this World, and suitable to that Quality to which he is so highly advanced; and should behave, in all Circumstances, so as not to disparage that Alliance with which he is so greatly honoured.

Let us, therefore, consider these Privileges of our Calling, and the Obligations we are hereby laid under to all Purity, and behave accordingly. — Again:

Not only the Love of God in redeeming us; not only our being solemnly dedicated to God by Baptism; not only our being allied to God in the great Benefit of Son-ship; but the Rule given us also further obliges us to a conscientious Discharge of our Christian Duty.

We, who own the Gospel of Christ for the Rule of our Actions, and who have engaged to observe all its Commands, are strongly bound to the due Performance of them.

Whoever reads the Gospel must know what Precepts it contains: There, all Sorts of Purity and Holiness, every Kind and Degree of Virtue is recommended; and whatever hath but the Appearance of Evil, is discouraged:

There, we are required to be holy as God is holy, and pure, even as He also is pure. We are not only forbid to commit Wickedness in Deed, but even our

Thoughts, if consenting to such things, are, by the Gospel, declared culpable.

We are not only commanded to refrain from the grosser Acts of Evil; but even to abstain from all Appearances of them," and to "overcome (if possible) all Evil with good."

Thus excellent is our Religion! most "worthy of God to give," and most "worthy of all Men to be received," observed, and obeyed. — But further,

As the Precepts of the Gospel do thus strictly enjoin us to Virtue and holy Obedience, so do its Promises equally invite us to it. For These, (as St. Peter tells us) "were given us, that by them we might be Partakers of the Divine Nature;" and that we might "give all Diligence to add to our Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance, and Patience, and Brotherly-Kindness, and Charity."

Accordingly, — St. Paul, after having made mention of God's favourable Declaration to his People, immediately exhorts us to qualify ourselves for its Reception. "Having therefore, dearly Beloved, these Promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness, both of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God." — And then,

As to the Threatnings of the Gospel, are they not powerful Arguments against Sin? being none other than

than "the Wrath of God revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men."

Thus doth the Religion of Christ strictly enjoin universal Righteousness and true Holiness.

"Let all, then, who name the Name of Christ," and own the Gospel for their Rule, "walk worthy of their Vocation," by seriously endeavouring to bring all their Thoughts, Words, and Works, to a Conformity with the Laws and Precepts of it. — Again,

Another Particular which should press us to the due Discharge of our Christian Duty, is, our professing to imitate the Life of Christ, whose Disciples we pretend to be. Now,

The very Notion of being a Disciple, is, to live according to the Pattern of him whom we call our Master. If therefore we profess to be Christ's Disciples; if we take Him for our Pattern, then "we must walk even as He also walked," and "not as the Gentiles who know not God, nor the Gospel of his Son."

I might here largely insist on every Part of our Saviour's Conduct, as recorded for our Instruction; but suffice it only to recommend to you the careful Perusal of it as given us by the Evangelists, wherein we may observe the Manner of His Life, and so be more fully persuaded ourselves to follow His most blessed Steps.

Again: — Having, by our Admission into this high

Privilege, an extraordinary Aſſiſtance from the Holy Spirit of God, is another Motive to encourage us in the due Diſcharge of our Chriſtian Duty.

Every one who is a Member of Chriſt hath, from God, a Promiſe of the Holy Spirit to aſſiſt him in his Duty; yea, and not only this, but alſo to be in him, as a Principle of Life, encouraging him to Goodneſs.

What Obligations, then, are hereby laid upon us to keep ourſelves holy and undefiled! — Yea,

What excellent Attainments ought we to make, in every Grace and Virtue, who have ſuch a divine Power within us, to ſupport and ſtrengthen us in all Difficulties, and to carry us on to the moſt noble Attainments?

No Man knows what he can do, till he is firmly reſolved to do whatever he can.— There are ſeveral Abilities unknown to the Poſſeſſors, which lie hid from the Mind for Want of an Occaſion to call them forth. (*) In-

(*) What is done in the Works of Art, may be effected alſo in Morals. Were a muſical Inſtrument to be placed into the Hands of a Peaſant, who had never heard or ſeen one, and were he told that he might, if he were to attend to it, call forth Sounds from it which would delight every Hearer, he would not be induced by any Argument to believe the Poſſibility of it. Yet let him regularly learn, and practice a due Time, and he will arrive at a Degree of Skill, which, tho far from Perfection, will appear miraculous on Compariſon with his original Inability. So

Inſtead of arming ourſelves with holy Reſolutions, inſtead of ſummoning all the Courage that ought to inſpire every faithful Soldier of Chriſt, how apt are we to intimidate ourſelves by imaginary Difficulties and Dangers? and thereby check that honeſt Ambition of ſtanding foremoſt in the Rank of good Men.

The laſt Particular I ſhall mention to encourage us in our Chriſtian Duty is, the ineffable Rewards of the World to come.

What Kind of Life ſhould we lead who are called out of this World, and have our Names enrolled among the Citizens of God; who, by our Profeſſion, declare our-

So in Life; If you inform your Diſciple, that he is able to reach a great Degree of Excellence, and urge him to the Attempt, he will infallibly make great Advances, and improve to his own Aſtoniſhment. But indulge his natural Indolence, Timidity, or Deſpair, by expatiating on the irremediable Weakneſs of human Nature, and you effectually preclude even his Endeavours, and add to his natural Imbecility.

In the Works of Art, in Sculpture, and in Painting, in the ſubordinate Operations of mechanical Ingenuity, to what Perfection does the Hand of Man attain? And, can Man improve himſelf ſo highly in the manual Arts, in Science, and in the Productions of Taſte, and be unable to arrive at real and ſolid Improvement in the nobleſt Art and the nobleſt Science, the Art and Science of conducting Life? Half the Attention and Conſtancy which is diſplayed in acquiring Skill in an Occupation, if beſtowed on the Melioration of Morals, would uſually produce a moſt laudable Character.

ourſelves to be Strangers and Pilgrims here, and to "look for an abiding and continuing City, not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens?"

Though we are allowed, by our gracious God, to make uſe of all things here, that tend to make our Abode tolerably eaſy and comfortable; yet, Heaven is our Home; is the Country we are in Purſuit of; is "the Prize of our high Calling in Chriſt Jeſus."

If therefore we would walk ſuitably to our Chriſtian Vocation, we ſhould have Reſpect to the Reward that is ſet before us, and live like thoſe who have ſo great Proſpect before them; for, by this Means, we ſhall not only ſecure to ourſelves this everlaſting Inheritance, which is the End of our Faith, and the Hope of our Calling; but we ſhall alſo hereby make the beſt Proviſion poſſible for a happy Life, even in this World; for, "Godlineſs hath the Promiſe of the Life that now is, as well as That which is to come." And Chriſt hath declared, that "if we ſeek firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs, all temporal good things ſhall be added unto us."

Seeing then theſe things, what great Motives and Engagements we have to Duty, let us endeavour at ſome proportionable and adequate Return: for, conſider how great things are promiſed, and have been done for us. To

To "walk worthy of our Vocation," then, is to live up to the Rules of Piety and Devotion, to the Rules of Juſtice and Honeſty, and to be temperate and ſober; it is, to perform our Duty to God, our Neighbour, and Ourſelves, with that Diligence and Circumſpection and Exactneſs as becomes Men who are fully perſuaded of the Truth of that Religion which they profeſs, and the Certainty of thoſe Rewards which they expect hereafter; – it is, to recommend Chriſtianity to Others, not only by making an open Profeſſion of its Faith, but by tranſcribing its Precepts into our Lives and Converſations; by demonſtrating to the World, that Religion and Virtue, notwithſtanding the Degeneracy of Mankind, are more than bare Names, having yet a real Exiſtence in the World. To this End, let us endeavour to obtain a meek and humble Frame of Spirit, and conſider our Wants and Imperfections, what Weakneſſes we are guilty of, what Graces we want, and how much we ſtand in need of the Divine Aſſiſtance, to enable us to do our Duty. Let us give a conſtant Attendance to the Offices of Religion, both public and private; for theſe are the Means appointed by God to convey Grace to Men.

We muſt alſo look frequently into the State & Condition of our Souls, and ſet-apart certain Portions of Time to examine ourſelves, and ſee what Advances we

have made in the Ways of Religion and Holineſs, what Sins we have committed, or Duties omitted to do; whether we grow better or worſe.

If theſe plain Rules were carefully and conſcientiouſly practiſed, doubtleſs, they would have a very great Influence on our Lives and Converſations, ſo as to make us abound in all Goodneſs. To which we ſhould alſo add, that we ſhould be careful to entertain and cheriſh the Motions of God's Holy Spirit; when we find any good Thoughts ſpringing up in our Minds, we ſhould impreſs them on our Memories, improve them by Meditation, and tranſcribe them into our Actions. We have daily new Vices to mortify, virtuous Diſpoſitions to exerciſe and cultivate, Temptations to reſiſt, and Afflictions to encounter; and all theſe require the Aſſiſtance of God's Grace, the which is never wanting to thoſe, who aſk it with Faith, and employ it with Diligence. And here,

That we may know what our Improvement and Growth in Grace is, let us examine, whether our Hatred againſt Sin, and Love to Religion, be increaſed: whether we go forward or backward, (for there is no Stand) in the Paths of Virtue and Holineſs: whether we perform our Duty with more Pleaſure and Delight than we have formerly done: whether we bear a greater Reſpect to all God's Commands: If ſo, Then we may con-

conclude and assure ourselves that we "grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," and may proceed with Steadiness and Perseverance: for These are sure and certain Signs of a lively and vital Religion; "He that doth Righteousness, is righteous."

Let us, then, proceed from one Degree of Virtue to another; let us improve in all Manner of Christian Virtues and Habits, and prove the Reality of our Growth in Grace, by a proportionable Growth in a good Life and Conversation. Let us not make a bare Profession of Religion, but "proceed in all Manner of Virtue and Godliness of Living." Let "our Obedience be entire, wanting nothing;" equally extending to all the divine Precepts, and to the whole Will of God, abounding in "all the Fruits of Righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the Praise and Glory of God:" thus constantly advancing higher in our Christian State, "walking worthy of our Vocation," "adorning the Doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in all things."

Lastly, I am to subjoin a few Arguments in Order to persuade those who profess Christianity to answer those Obligations to a holy Life, which their Religion lays upon them.

We call ourselves Christians, as such therefore let us live; and not deceive ourselves with an empty Name,

but fill up this great Title, and make good our Profession by a suitable Life and Conversation. And, — To persuade us hereto, I shall urge these three Considerations.

First, The Indecency of the Contrary,

2dly, The great Scandal of it to our Blessed Saviour and his Holy Religion. — And,

3dly, The infinite Danger of it to our own Souls.

First, If we call ourselves Christians, we thereby profess to entertain the Doctrine of Christ; which (as we have seen) contains the most exact Rules for the Conduct and Government of our Lives, with Promises to invite us to be good; and Threatnings, to deter us from Evil, with the greatest Assistances to the Performance of our Duty. — And!

For a Man, whose Profession and Calling is such, not to walk, in any Respect, worthy of it, wants Words to describe the Deformity of it. Nothing is more absurd, than for a Man to pretend to great Matters, and to perform nothing of what he pretends to. If the Gospel does not restrain us from Sin, it is a convincing Argument that we do not believe it: — for if we did believe it, it would have its due Effect upon us, and we should evidence it by our Actions; and not live like Heathens, "who know not God, nor the Gospel of his Son."

It

It is justly a Reflexion upon Men, in other Callings, when they are not skilled in the things they profess. A Man is easily pardoned for other Defects, but the Skill of his proper Art is at all Times justly expected from him. — So,

For a Christian, the worst thing that can be said of him, is, that, tho orthodox in his Opinion, he is yet faulty in Practice. If a Christian fails in a good Life, which is the End of his Profession, where is the Glory of his Calling? and why boasts he of his Religion? He is only a Pretender to it, and his wicked Life proves but his deeper Hypocrisy. (*) — But, Lastly,

(*) A "Philosopher (says Tully) is unpardonable if he miscarries in his Life, because he pretends to be a Master in this, in the Art of living better than others." With how much greater Reason may we challenge Christians, whose Lives are so directly contrary to their Profession? A Christian does not pretend to have a better Wit, or a more piercing Understanding than others, but he professeth, to live better than they, to be more chast and temperate, more just and charitable, more meek and gentle, more loving and peaceable than others: and, if he fails in these, to what Purpose is all his mighty Boasting of the Pre-eminence of the Gospel? It is to no Purpose to persuade Men, that we heartily entertain the Doctrine of Christ, that Doctrine which hath all the Characters of Piety and Justice, of Holiness and Virtue upon it; which obligeth us to "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, lovely, and of good Report," if we have no Regard to these things in our Lives. "Faith without Works is dead." However orthodox we may be in our

2dly, The wicked Christian, (if we may call him by that sacred Name,) not only by his Wickedness disgraces himself, but does also hereby a real Injury to Religion: And that, in Proportion, as he is esteemed for his Sense and Understanding: for such Apostacy seems to say, that "Religion hath been weighed in the Balance, and found wanting:" wanting at least, in the chief End and Effect of it, in the Regulation of his Life and Conduct.

When Men hear of the boasted Excellencies of our Profession, how grievously must they be disappointed, when they consider the Deformity of our Lives.

As therefore we would not proclaim to the World that the Gospel is an unholy thing, let us take heed that we bring no Disgrace upon it by our Lives: for the greatest Enmity we can shew against it, is, to profess it, and yet live contrary to it. (*)

This Consideration ought greatly to affect us. The Apostle speaks of it with great Concern & Vehemence: "Many (says he) walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are Enemies to the Cross of Christ; whose End is Destruction, whose God is their Belly, whose Glory is their Shame, who mind earthly things." As

Opinions; yet, when all is done, there is no such Error and Heresy, nothing so fundamentally opposite to Religion, as a wicked Life; consequently nothing more disgraceful to Christians.

(*) See Vol. vii. Page 46. &c.

As therefore we tender the Honour of our Saviour, and the Credit of our Religion, let us conform our Lives to the Precepts of Chriſtianity. And if there be any, who are reſolved to continue in a vicious Courſe, to the Injury and Diſparagement of Chriſtianity, we could almoſt intreat them to quit their Profeſſion, that they would renounce their Religion, and lay-aſide their Title and Claim to Chriſtianity: for, it were really better, upon ſome Accounts, that ſuch Men ſhould abandon their Profeſſion, than be thus detrimental to it.

Whenever therefore, we are tempted to any thing ſinful, let us remember and conſider what Title we bear, by what Name we are called, and whoſe Diſciples we pretend to be, and then think whether the Actions we do, become us, or not. — But,

Laſtly, Let us conſider the Danger we expoſe ourſelves to by not living anſwerably to our Religion.

This perhaps may prevail upon ſuch, as are not apt to be moved by ſofter Conſiderations.

Hypocrites are inſtanced in Scripture, as a Sort of Sinners that ſhall have the ſharpeſt Torments and fierceſt Damnation. When our Saviour would ſet forth the great Severity of the Lord towards the evil Servant, He expreſſeth it thus, "He ſhall cut him aſunder, and appoint him his Portion with the Hypocrites:" — ſo that the Puniſhment of Hypocrites ſeems

to be the Measure and Standard of the highest Punishment.

We profess to believe in Christ, and to hope in him for Salvation; but in the mean Time are wicked and unholy: In this Case we do not believe, but presume on him, and therefore shall find at the great Day, that this our Confidence will be our Confusion; and that He, whom we hope to be our Advocate and Saviour, will prove our Accuser and Judge. Indeed,

All the Sins that are committed by Christians, under the Enjoyment of the Gospel, are of deeper Dye, than the Sins of other Men, because done under greater Advantages and Opportunities of being happy.

Happy, therefore, had it been for us if we had "never known the Way of Righteousness, than after having known it, to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto us." The Goodness and Love, even of God himself, become to the incorrigible and obstinate, only the Foundation of Fear and Danger. Every Blessing He hath bestowed, or offered, the Regeneration of Baptism, the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Love of God, the Gift of his only Son, the Mission of the Holy Spirit, and the everlasting Habitations prepared in Heaven, if we refuse to hear, now when they call us to Amendment, hereafter will "rise up in Judgment against us, and condemn us."

A Chriſtian ſtands not on the ſame Level with other Men. As his Virtues ought to be more eminent: what he does amiſs, is more criminal. God hath provided for him the higheſt Manſions in the Kingdom of Glory, and is deſirous to place him neareſt to himſelf in Heaven; but if he reſiſt the Means of Grace, and reject the Offer of Salvation, his Puniſhment will be as terrible as his Hopes were glorious.

I have inſiſted, the rather, upon theſe Arguments, that I might, if poſſible, awaken Men to a ſerious Conſideration of their Lives, and perſuade them to a real Reformation of them; that I might oblige all thoſe who call themſelves Chriſtians, to live up to the eſſential and fundamental Laws of our Religion, mortifying their Luſts, and ſubduing their Paſſions, and ſincerely endeavouring to grow in Grace, to increaſe in every Virtue, and in all Godlineſs of Living.

This, indeed, would become our Profeſſion, and be honourable to Religion, and would remove one of the greateſt Obſtacles to the Progreſs of the Goſpel.

If ever we would have the Chriſtian Religion effectually recommended, it muſt be by the holy and unblamable Lives of its Profeſſors. Then indeed, it will look with ſo amiable a Countenance as to invite many to it, and carry ſo much Majeſty and Authority in it, as to command Reverence from its greateſt Enemies,

and make even Infidels themſelves to acknowledge that "God is in us of a Truth," and themſelves alſo to "glorify our Father which in Heaven."

Add to this, that ſuch a Conduct is the Dignity of our Nature, as well as the Exaltation of it hereafter; for as Sin debaſes us, ſo Righteouſneſs as exceedingly exalts us: Experience, Reaſon and Revelation abundantly confirming it. But,

What moſt of all enforces it upon us, is, that our future Reward will be proportioned to us according to our Improvements in this Life. "As one Star differeth from another Star in Glory," ſo alſo will the Righteous in Heaven. According to the different Degrees of Perfection which they have here attained, ſo will be their Happineſs hereafter.

So far, then, ought we to be from conſidering this Life, as a dull Round of inſignificant Follies, that we ought to look upon it as an indefinite Line, wherein every Step we take, is, or ought to be, an important and valuable Advance in Goodneſs, anſwerable to our high Calling of God, in Chriſt Jeſus; an Addition to that Number of good Actions, whoſe Sum will render our Happineſs the more exalted and complete. It will carry us on, till we become here on Earth, a little lower than the Angels; and by a natural and eaſy Tranſition, be made equal to them in Heaven. And,

To

To encourage us herein it is very obſervable that the Scriptures have not determined what preciſe Quantity of Goodneſs will intitle us to the Favour of God; it being their Deſign to make Men, not juſt ſo far virtuous, and no further; but to make them as virtuous and pious as poſſible. — Accordingly,

We are commanded to "grow in Grace, to "go on to Perfection," — to "be perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect," — to "be holy even as He is holy, and merciful as He alſo is merciful."

The Degrees indeed of theſe Perfections we ſhall never be able fully to reach; nor indeed is it the Intention of the Command that we ſhould; — but it is in our Power to make a conſtant and unwearied Progreſs in all the Kinds of theſe Perfections. The Rule is perfect that Room might be given to the moſt exalted Attainment, but the abſolute Perfection of it unattainable, that "he that glorieth, may glorie in the Lord."

Our Condemnation will not lie in this, that we did not exactly tranſcribe the Original, or walk perfectly to the Rule given us; but that we did not make the Copy ſo complete as was in our Power.

The beſt Conviction and Aſſurance therefore, that we can have of truly diſcharging our Duty, is the Evidence of this Progreſs in our Chriſtian Courſe. All other Marks may fail us; but we can never be miſ-

taken in the Survey of ſuch Actions as are laid in the Principles of ſound Reaſon, and are conducted by the Rule, and ſupported by the Faith of the Goſpel; whoſe Number are meaſured by all the Opportunities we have, or can find. — To Conclude,

We may obſerve, that it hath pleaſed our Creator to conſtitute our Frame in ſuch a Manner, as that we advance gradually to the perfect Uſe of Reaſon; a Faculty, whoſe Increaſe we are for a long Time as inſenſible of, as we are of the Increaſe of our Stature.

We have likewiſe very good Arguments to perſuade us, that the Soul, in a future State, will not ſtop-ſhort at any certain Period of Happineſs, but advance conſtantly to greater Acceſſions of Bliſs and Glory. (*)

Ought we not therefore to conclude, that during the intermediate Interval, in Order to render the whole of our Exiſtence, uniform; the Soul (by Parity of Reaſon) ſhould preſerve the ſame Tenor of Improvement in all Virtue & Godlineſs of living; that we ſhould preſerve ſuch an Uniform in our Obedience, that our Lives may know no Variety, but in their Increaſe towards Perfection; that in their growing nearer to Eternity, they may be more prepared for its bleſſed Reception.

(*) See Vol. vi. Page 200, &c.

Sermon

SERMON CCCXLIX.

Evil Habits, Sin and Danger of them.

Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Æthiopian change his Skin, "or the Leopard his Spots? then may ye alſo do "good, that are accuſtomed to do Evil."

Conſidering the great Difficulty of reclaiming thoſe who are far gone in an evil Courſe, it is neceſſary to uſe all Sorts of Arguments to this Purpoſe: from the Conſideration of the Evil of Sin, and of the Goodneſs of God, and of his Patience & Longſuffering towards us in the midſt of our Provocations: from his Mercy and Pity declared to us in all thoſe gracious Means and Methods which He uſeth for our Recovery: from his Readineſs, upon our Repentance, to receive us into Favour, and be reconciled to us: from the final Iſſue and Event of a wicked Life, and the great and endleſs Miſeries of another World, into which we ſhall moſt inevitably fall, unleſs we repent in Time, and return to a better Mind: and laſtly, from the Danger of being hardened in an evil Courſe, paſt all Remedy & Hopes of Recovery.

The

The holy Scriptures, to make us wise unto Salvation, instruct us in all these Methods, and give us all possible Encouragement to the Practice of our Duty; particularly by assuring us that whatsoever Sins we have committed, if we repent of, and forsake them, we shall be forgiven. No Hour is represented as too late, nor Time limited, after which our Repentance will not be accepted. But,

That this Goodness of God, thus always ready to pardon, should not encourage us to continue in Sin, and put off our Repentance to a distant Day, the same Scriptures assure us, that, by long persisting to offend, we may make ourselves almost incapable of Amendment.

God continues ever ready to shew Mercy to us, when we turn from our evil Ways: but no good will thence arise to us, if we, by adding Sin to Sin, should harden ourselves till we lose all Inclination, and almost all Power to qualify ourselves for receiving his Mercy.

This is the Doctrine of the Text; and the Meaning is, that they who are "accustomed to do evil," will find the Work of Repentance and Reformation, tho not indeed impossible, yet truly hard to be performed.

This Truth I shall make appear under the following Particulars; as they will, at once, be most instructive, and inducing to Amendment. First,

Firſt, I ſhall point out the particular Progreſs of Sin, and the ſeveral Ways by which evil Habits gain upon us.

Secondly, The Reaſons why the Difficulty of Reformation is here ſo ſeverely expreſſed, with the due Limitation wherein this, and the like Texts, are to be explained. — And therefore,

Laſtly, Notwithſtanding the appearing Impoſſibility, there is yet Ground and Hope of Encouragement, if we are not wanting to ourſelves.

Firſt, I am to ſhew the growing Danger of Sin, and by what Steps and Degrees evil Habits do inſenſibly gain upon Men, — that knowing This, we may be the more tender in Theſe Points, and ſo keep ourſelves free from the Evil of them.

All the Actions of Men which are not natural, but proceed from Deliberation and Choice, have ſomething of Difficulty in them when we begin to practiſe them; but when practiſed awhile, they become more eaſy: and by Frequency of Acts they grow into Habits; confirmed Habits are a Kind of ſecond Nature, and ſo far as any thing is natural, ſo far it is neceſſary, and cannot without Difficulty be avoided. This is the natural Progreſs of all Habits, indifferently conſidered, whether they be good or bad. — But,

Vicious Habits have a greater Advantage, and are

of a quicker Growth. For, the corrupt Nature of Man is a rank Soil, to which Vice takes eaſily, and wherein it thrives apace. The Mind of Man hath need to be prepared for Piety and Virtue; it muſt be cultivated to That End, and ordered with great Care and Pains: but, Vices are Weeds, which ſpring up of themſelves: – They are in ſome ſort, natural to the Soil, and ſtrike early in with the Conſtitution, and therefore need not be planted or watered; it is ſufficient if they be only neglected, or let alone. (*)

So that Vice having this Advantage from our Nature, it is no wonder if Occaſion and Temptation eaſily draw it forth. — But,

That we may take a more diſtinct Account of the Progreſs of Sin, and ſee by what Steps it gains upon Men, I ſhall mark out ſome of the chief and more obſervable Gradations of it. — As,

Firſt, Men begin with leſſer Sins. No Man is perfectly wicked at once, nor any ſo totally degenerate, but at the firſt they are aſhamed when they venture upon a known Sin, tho it be but ſmall in Compariſon. – Hence it is that Men at the Beginning are very ſolicitous to palliate and hide their Faults by Excuſes; but after they have frequently committed them, and they grow too

(*) *Ager, quamvis fertilis, ſine tamen Culturâ fertilis eſſe non poteſt; ſic ſine Doctrinâ Animus. Neglectis arenda Filix innaſcitur Agris.*

too visible to be concealed, they then attempt to defend and maintain them. This is the first Step — But,

2dly, After Men have been some Time initiated in these lesser Sins, they proceed by Degrees to greater and fouler Crimes, to such as lay waste the Conscience, and offer more Violence to the Light and Reason of their Minds. It is true, they start at the first Temptation to a more gross and notorious Sin, and the Terrors of their own Mind, and the Fears of eternal Wrath are uneasy to them: (*) — but, this wears-off by Degrees, and that which was at first difficult, does by frequent Practice and long Custom become easy.

3dly, When Men have proceeded thus far, they begin to put-off Shame, which is one of the greatest Restraints from Sin which God hath implanted in human Nature; yea, and possibly, they may even approve their Vices, and resist every Means offered for their Recovery.

This is the Sinner in his HARDENED State, and These the Ways by which he arrives to it.

The Reasons, therefore, why the Difficulty of Reformation is here so severely expressed, comes now,

2dly,

(*) *Me trahit invitum nova Vis; aliudque Cupido,*
Mens aliud suadet. Video meliora, proboque,
Deteriora sequor. See Rom. vii. 15.

Man, that is compounded of Soul and Body, has naturally a civil War within him. Serm. CCCXLIX.

2dly, To be pointed out, with the due Limitation wherein This, and the like Texts, are to be explained. — And,

First, This Difficulty ariſeth, partly from the general Nature of Habits themſelves, indifferently conſidered, whether good, bad, or indifferent; partly, from the particular Nature of evil and vicious Habits; and partly, from the natural and judicial Conſequences of a long Progreſs and Continuance in them.

From the Deſcription already given of Habits, and their Power over us, will appear the Difficulty of reforming them. The Perfection of any Habit, whether good or bad, induceth a Kind of Neceſſity of acting according to it. A rooted Habit becomes a governing Principle, and bears almoſt an equal Sway with us as Nature itſelf. Indeed, it is a Kind of new Nature ſuperinduced, and even as hard to be expelled as tho it was primitively and originally natural. The further we proceed, the more we are confirmed in them: and that which we at firſt did voluntarily, by Degrees becomes ſo natural and neceſſary, that it is almoſt impoſſible for us to do otherwiſe.

This is plainly ſeen in the Experience of every Day, in things good and bad, both in leſſer and greater Matters. — But,

2dly, This Difficulty ariſeth more eſpecially from the

the particular Nature of evil and vicious Habits themſelves.

Theſe, (as we have ſeen) becauſe they are ſuitable to our corrupt Nature, and conſpire with the Inclinations of it, are likely to be of a much quicker Growth and Improvement, and in a ſhorter Space, and with leſs Care and Endeavour, to arrive at Maturity and Strength, than the Habits of Grace and Goodneſs.

Add to this, — The falſe Biaſs which vicious Inclinations caſt upon the Mind and Judgment: — When "Men are corrupt, and become abominable in their Doings, they ſay in their Hearts there is no God" (i.e) they would feign think ſo, — and every thing ſerves for an Argument to a willing Mind; and every little Objection appears ſtrong and conſiderable, which makes againſt That which Men are loath ſhould be true. Yea, they boaſt of their Sins, and glorie in their Vices, when they are half-perſuaded that they are generous and commendable Qualities.

Not that any Man ever ſatisfied himſelf in the Principles of Infidelity, or was able to arrive to a ſteady and unſhaken Perſuaſion of the Truth of them, ſo as not vehemently to doubt and fear the contrary. However, by this Means, many deceive themſelves with a falſe Hope, and thereby ſin with the leſs Diſturbance; and conſequently, when theſe Reſtraints are removed

the Work of Iniquity more exceedingly abounds.

3dly, The Difficulty of this Change ariſeth ſtill further from the natural and judicial Conſequences of a long Progreſs and Continuance in an evil Courſe; (i.e.) inveterate and evil Habits do, partly from their own Nature, and partly from the juſt Judgment and Permiſſion of God, put Men under ſeveral Diſadvantages in their Chriſtian Progreſs.

By a long Cuſtom of ſinning Men's Conſciences become callous; ſo that, except upon ſome extraordinary Occaſion, they are ſeldom awakened to a Senſe of their Guilt. The beſt Counſels make but little Impreſſion on them; for they are hardened againſt Reproof, and impenetrable to good Advice; which therefore is ſeldom offered them even by their beſt Friends, as they know it to be both unacceptable, and unlikely to prevail. Beſides,

Habitual Wickedneſs is naturally apt to baniſh Conſideration, to weaken our Reſolution, and to diſcourage our Hopes both of God's Grace and Aſſiſtance, and of his Mercy and Forgiveneſs, which are the beſt Means and Encouragements to Repentance.

Sin is an Enemy to Conſideration; eſpecially when Men are deeply laden with Iniquity. The Number of their Offences, together with the Greatneſs and Deformity of them, naturally deter them from a Conſideration of them. Beſides, What

What the Prophet ſays of particular Vices, is proportionably true of all; – "They take away the Heart." As long Cuſtom and Continuance in Sin deprives us of our Strength, ſo it diſcourages our Hopes, both of God, Grace, and Aſſiſtance, and of his Mercy and Forgiveneſs. For how can Men expect the Continuance of that Grace, which they have ſo often received in vain? After ſo many Provocations, how can they hope for Mercy and Forgiveneſs? Deſpair doth almoſt naturally ſpring from an evil Conſcience; and when Men are thoroughly awakened to a Senſe of Sin, and of the infinite Evil of it, as they cannot eaſily forgive themſelves, ſo they can hardly believe that there is Goodneſs enough any where to forgive them.

But beſides theſe Diſadvantages, which are natural and conſequent upon a vicious Courſe; by the juſt Judgment of God, his Spirit is withdrawn from them, and they are given up to their own Hearts' Luſts, to commit all Iniquity with Greedineſs. And then there is hardly any thing left, either to reſtrain them in their evil Courſe, or to recover them out of it.

And not only ſo; but by the juſt Permiſſion of God, as Men grow worſe and more wicked, the Devil hath a nearer Acceſs to them, and more immediate Power over them. For, as they who are reclaimed from an evil Courſe are ſaid, in Scripture, to be "reſcued out

of the Snare of the Devil," and to be "turned from the Power of Satan unto God;" ſo, on the other Hand, the further Men advance in the Ways of Sin, ſo much the further they depart from God, from the Influence of his Grace, and the Care of his Protection & Providence; and conſequently give the Devil, (who neglects no Advantages againſt us,) greater Opportunities over us.

And thus, paſſing from one Degree of Sin to another, the Sinner becomes hardened in his Wickedneſs, and inſenſibly falls into That, in which, without a miraculous Grace from God, (the which, from his former Abuſe, he hath the leaſt Reaſon to expect,) he is like to continue forever.

We ſpeak not this to diſcourage the greateſt of Sinners from Repentance. Tho their Caſe be extremely difficult, yet it is not quite deſperate. For "thoſe things which ſeem impoſſible with Men, are poſſible with God:" but on Purpoſe to ſtop Sinners, if poſſible, in their evil Courſe, and to diſcourage them from going on in Sin till they get into the Habits of it, which are not eaſily recovered. — Which brings me to ſhew the due Limitation in which this, and the like Texts, are to be underſtood. For,

We muſt all be ſenſible that to diſcourſe to Men of the Impoſſibility, or at leaſt the extreme Difficulty, of reforming evil Habits, ſeems to be a contrary Argument

ment to the Purpoſe, as more apt to drive to Deſpair, than gain them to Repentance. — But,

Since the Spirit of God is pleaſed to make uſe of it to this Purpoſe, we may ſafely rely upon infinite Wiſdom for the Fitneſs of it to awaken Sinners to a Senſe of their Condition, in Order to their Recovery. For here, in the Text, after terrible Threatnings of Captivity and Deſolation to the People of the Jews, who were extremely wicked and degenerate, through an univerſal Depravation of Manners in all Ranks of Men from the higheſt to the loweſt, ſo that they ſeemed to ſtand upon the Brink of Ruin, and to be fatally devoted to it; to add to the Terror and Force of theſe Threatnings, God by his Prophet repreſents to them the infinite Danger and extreme Difficulty of their Caſe, to ſee if he could ſtartle them by telling them into what a deſperate Condition they had plunged themſelves; being by a long Cuſtom of ſinning ſo far engaged in an evil Courſe, that they had almoſt cut-off themſelves from a Poſſibility of Retreat; ſo that the Difficulty of their Change ſeemed next to a natural Impoſſibility. "Can the Æthiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? then may ye alſo do good, that are accuſtomed to do evil."

The Expreſſion is very high, and it is to be hoped ſomewhat hyperbolical, and above the juſt Meaning of

the Words. Which are, we think, only deſigned to ſignify to us the extreme Difficulty of making this Change; which is therefore reſembled to a natural Impoſſibility, as coming very near it, though not altogether up to it.

And that this Expreſſion is thus to be mitigated, will appear more than probable, by conſidering ſome other like Paſſages of Scripture. As, where our Saviour compares the Difficulty of a rich Man's Salvation to That which is naturally impoſſible, (viz) to "a Camel's paſſing through the Eye of a Needle;" nay, he pitcheth his Expreſſion higher, and doth not only make it a thing of equal, but of greater Difficulty; "I ſay unto you, it is eaſier for a Camel to go through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God." And yet when he comes to explain this to his Diſciples, he tells them that he only meant that the thing was very difficult, "how hard is it for thoſe that have Riches to be ſaved?" and that it was not abſolutely impoſſible, according to human Probability: "with Man this is impoſſible, but not with God."

And thus alſo it is reaſonable to underſtand that ſevere Paſſage of the Apoſtle, (Heb. vi. 4.) "It is impoſſible for them that were once enlightened, if they fall away, to renew them again to Repentance." It is impoſſible, that is, it is very difficult. In like Manner,

we

we are to underſtand this high Expreſſion in the Text, "Can the Æthiopean change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? then may ye alſo do good that are accuſtomed to do evil;" that is, this moral Change of Men, ſettled and fixed in bad Habits, is almoſt as difficult as the other. They are not to be underſtood according to the ſtrictneſs of the Letter; but only as importing the extreme Difficulty of overcoming them.

If theſe Words were to be taken rigorouſly, and in the ſtricteſt Senſe, it would be wholly Folly to exhort an habitual Sinner to Repentance, and an unreaſonable thing to expect from him a natural Impoſſibility.

The Genius of ſublime and figurative Language requires ſuch lively Expreſſions, and deſcribes things which are thus hard to be accompliſhed, as though they were impoſſible.

"Evil Habits, then, are not eaſily broken;" though they are at firſt indifferent, yet, in Proceſs of Time they become almoſt unavoidable. (*) It is with the Habits of Sin, as with all others; they are acquired by repeated Acts, they fix themſelves upon us in the ſame Manner, and are corrected with the ſame Difficulty.

A Sinner, by long offending, contracts an Averſion to his Duty, and withal weakens his Powers to perform it:

By

(*) *Et facilis Deſcenſus Averni.* See Matt. vii. 13, 14.

By giving way to his Passions he hath made them ungovernable; they are always soliciting him for the same Indulgence, and he is ever uneasy till they are satisfied; (*) they rise of themselves, and stay not for his Consent: by every Victory over him they gain new Strength, and he grows less able to resist them.

Experience, indeed, shews us, that there are but few who forsake any Vice to which they are remarkably addicted: but if set right at first, we proceed with Ease, and each new Task is done with Pleasure; but if neglected till we grow in Years, Error becomes habitual, and we are seldom, if ever reformed.

The Truth of this may easily be seen in those Faults of the Mind, for which Men seem not to be much concerned.

Bad Dispositions seldom forsake him in whom they are fixed; if they have accompanied him from Youth to Manhood, they will, in all Probability, follow him through the longest Old-age, down to the Grave; and beyond it, to the World of separate Spirits. Since

(*) *Ut Lynx suas Maculas non immutat, ita neque mala Natura suos Mores. Lupus Pilum mutat, non Mentem. Naturam expellas Furcâ, tamen usquè recurret. Ad Mores Natura recurrit. Suam quisque Pellem portat. Naturæ sequitur Semina quisque suæ. Nigra Lanarum nullum bibunt Colorem. Vera redit Facies, dissimulata perit.*

Young People change their Taste and Inclinations by the Ferment and Heat of their Blood, and old Ones keep theirs by the Sullenness of Habit and Custom.

Since ſuch is the Malignity of the evil Habits of the Mind, we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, that thoſe Vices which are of a groſſer Kind, and in which the Body is more employed, differ little from the former; that Intemperance, Senſuality, and the like, are almoſt with as much Difficulty corrected, as Pride, Avarice, and Envy. (*)

As to the Scriptures, they perpetually repreſent to us the Unreaſonableneſs and Folly, the Baſeneſs and bad Conſequences of Sin; whence we ſhould conclude, that if Sin, in general, and every ſingle Act of it, be ſo dangerous, repeated and habitual Sins muſt be exceedingly more ſo. When the Scriptures ſpeak of evil Habits, they make uſe of Figures as ſtrong and bold as Language can utter, or Imagination conceive, to ſet forth their pernicious Nature.

Perſons in That Condition are ſaid to be "incloſed in a Snare;" – "to be taken Captives;" – "to have ſold themſelves to work Wickedneſs;" and, "to be in a State of Bondage and Slavery;"

They are ſaid to have loſt all their diſcerning Faculties; – to be "deaf," – to be "blind," and to "walk in Darkneſs;" – to be "hardened, and paſt feeling;"

to

(*) *Conſuetudo penè invincibilis. Quæ longâ Annorum Serie, frequentiſſimâque Actionem Iteratione acquiruntur, in alteram quaſi Naturam tranſeunt.* Serm. CCCXLIX.

to be "ſick beyond Hopes of Recovery," and to be "dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins."

To part with a beloved Vice is THERE ſaid to be as the cutting-off of a Right-hand, or plucking out a Right-eye:

To return from a long Courſe of Sin to Righteouſneſs is THERE repreſented as a Reſurrection from the Dead, and a new Creation.

Even thoſe Paſſages of Scripture, which contain great Encouragement and favourable Promiſes to Repentance, inform us, at the ſame Time, of the Difficulty of amending. Our Saviour gives a plain and familiar Repreſentation of it:

"A Shepherd (ſays he) rejoiceth MORE over one Sheep which was loſt, and is found, than over ninety and nine which went not aſtray." — And,

The Reaſon, among others, is this; becauſe he could not reaſonably expect ſuch good Fortune, and had but little Hopes of again finding a Creature, expoſed to a thouſand Dangers, and unable to ſhift for itſelf.

Thus the Nature of Sin, the uſual Conſequences of it, Experience, and the Word of God, do all concur to eſtabliſh this Truth, that a Change from habitual Vice to Virtue is ſeldom made, and not without great Difficulty; – ſo that if a Man be once loſt to any criminal Paſſion, whatſoever it be, neither he, nor any other

other Person can say, where he shall make a Stand. (*)

It concerns us, therefore, if we have any Reverence to God, or Love of Virtue; any Desire of Happiness, or Dread of Misery, to take heed in the Beginning, and to stop the first Growth of every corrupt Passion; or, if we have proved so unhappy as to have given way to it hitherto, it becomes us to retreat with Speed, that we may not in Time be so far enslaved, as to be forced on Expedients, which we shall scarce know either how to avoid, or bear.

SERMON CCCL.

On the same Subject.

Evil Habits, not insurmountable.

Jer. xiii. 23. "Can the Æthiopian change his Skin, "or the Leopard his Spots? then may ye also do "good, that are accustomed to do Evil."

The Nature of evil Habits, and the Difficulty of their Reformation, being already discussed, I am now,

Lastly, To shew, that, notwithstanding the appearing Impossibility, &c. ☞ (under)

[illegible] impossible with Men, are yet possible with God." This

(*) Ill Customs rise to Habits,—Ill Habits soon become exalted Vice: They gather by unseen Degrees, as Brooks make Rivers, Rivers swell to Seas. Serm. CCCXLIX.

to be "ſick beyond Hopes of Recovery," and to be "dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins."

To part with a beloved Vice is THERE ſaid to be as the cutting-off of a Right-hand, or plucking out a Right-eye:

To return from a long Courſe of Sin to Righteouſneſs is THERE repreſented as a Reſurrection from the Dead, and a new Creation.

Even thoſe Paſſages of Scripture, which contain great Encouragement and favourable Promiſes to Repentance, inform us, at the ſame Time, of the Difficulty of amending. Our Saviour gives a plain and familiar Repreſentation of it:

"A Shepherd (ſays he) rejoiceth MORE over one Sheep which was loſt, and is found, than over ninety and nine which went not aſtray." — And,

The Reaſon, among others, is this; becauſe he could not reaſonably expect ſuch good Fortune, and had but little Hopes of again finding a Creature, expoſed to a thouſand Dangers, and unable to ſhift for itſelf.

Thus the Nature of Sin, the uſual Conſequences of it, Experience, and the Word of God, do all concur to eſtabliſh this Truth, that a Change from habitual Vice to Virtue is ſeldom made, and not without great Difficulty; — ſo that if a Man be once loſt to any criminal Paſſion, whatſoever it be, neither he, nor any other

ing Impoſſibility of the Caſe, there is yet Ground and Hope of Encouragement, if we are not wanting to ourſelves.

The Caſe of theſe Perſons, tho it be extremely difficult, is yet not deſperate; — they may yet be reclaimed and brought to Goodneſs. Indeed, humanly ſpeaking, and according all Appearance and Probability, the Thing ſeems to be very hopeleſs, and next to an Impoſſibility; but yet what our Saviour ſaid concerning the Difficulty of a rich Man's Salvation will reach alſo to this Caſe, tho much more difficult, "thoſe Things which are impoſſible with Men, are yet poſſible with God." This

(*) Ill Cuſtoms riſe to Habits,—Ill Habits ſoon become exalted Vice: They gather by unſeen Degrees, as Brooks make Rivers, Rivers ſwell to Seas. Serm. CCCXLIX.

This will appear, if we conſider that even in the worſt of Men there is ſomething left which tends to reclaim them, to awaken them to Conſideration, and to urge & encourage them to a ſteady Reſolution of a better Courſe; and this, accompanied with the powerful Aſſiſtance of God's Grace, which, when ſincerely ſought, is never to be deſpaired of, may prove effectual to bring-back even the greateſt of Sinners. — As,

First, There is left even in the worſt of Men a natural Senſe of the Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Sin, which can ſcarce ever be totally extinguiſhed in human Nature. For, tho' the Habits of great Vices are exceeding apt to harden Men, ſo that they have ſeldom a juſt Senſe of their evil Ways; yet theſe Perſons are ſometimes under ſtrong Convictions, and their Conſciences do ſeverely rebuke and check them for their Faults. They are, at Seaſons, under great Apprehenſion of the Danger of their Condition, and that the Courſe which they are in, if they continue in it, will prove fatal at laſt: eſpecially when their Conſciences are thoroughly awakened by ſome great Affliction, or the near Approach of Death, and the lively Senſe of another World.

The Apprehenſion of theſe things will have great Effect upon them, and make them uſe their beſt Endeavours, by every Means in their Power, to avoid it.

2dly, Very bad Men when they have any Thoughts of becoming better, are apt to conceive ſome good Hopes of God's Grace and Mercy. For, tho' they find all the Cauſes and Reaſons of Deſpair in themſelves, yet the Conſideration of the boundleſs Goodneſs and Compaſſion of God, (how undeſerved ſoever on their Part) is apt to kindle ſome Sparks of Hope, even in the moſt deſponding Mind. His wonderful Patience, in the midſt of our manifold Provocations, cannot but be a good Sign to us that He willeth not that we ſhould periſh, but rather that we ſhould come to Repentance, and be ſaved. And, If we do repent, we are aſſured, by his Promiſe, that we ſhall be forgiven. "He that confeſſeth and forſaketh his Sins, ſhall have Mercy"—"If we confeſs our Sins, He is faithful and juſt to forgive us our Sins, and to cleanſe us from all Unrighteouſneſs." Again,

3dly, Who knows what Men, thoroughly rouſed and ſtarted, may reſolve to do? A mighty Reſolution will bear thro Difficulties which ſeem inſupportable. Nature, tho' weak, yet when irritated and ſtirred, will do great things. The Reſolutions of Men, upon the Brink of Deſpair, have been of an incredible Force: and the Soul of Man in nothing more diſcovers its divine Power and Original, than in that Spring that is in it, whereby it recovers itſelf when it is mightily urg-

ged and preſt. There is a Sort of Reſolution which is in a Manner invincible, and hardly any Difficulty can reſiſt it, or ſtand before it.

Of this there have been great Inſtances in ſeveral Kinds. (*) When Men are preſt by Neceſſity, and Nature is urged to the utmoſt, they diſcover in themſelves a Power which they thought they had not, and find at laſt, that they can do That which at firſt, they deſpaired of. (‡)

4thly, The Grace and Aſſiſtance of God when ſincerely ſought, is never to be deſpaired of. So that if we do but heartily, and in good earneſt reſolve upon a better Courſe, and implore the Help of God's Grace to this Purpoſe, no Degree of it, that is neceſſary, will be wanting to us. And here is our chief Ground of Hope. For we are weak and unſtable as Water; and when we have taken up good Reſolutions, do eaſily ſtart

(*) Socrates and Demoſthenes are two great Examples of this, who almoſt exceeded Mankind in thoſe two things for which by Nature they ſeemed to be leaſt made, and moſt unfit. One, in governing his Paſſions; the Other, in the mighty Force and Power of his Eloquence.

(‡) The two great Encouragements to Virtue which Pythagoras gave to his Scholars were Theſe; and they were worthy of ſo great a Philoſopher: Firſt, "Chooſe always the beſt Courſe of Life, and Cuſtom will ſoon make it the moſt pleaſant." The Other was, that "Power and Neceſſity are Neighbours, and never dwell far from one another."

ſtart from them. So that freſh Supplies, and a continued Aſſiſtance of God's Grace is neceſſary to keep up the firſt Warmth and Strength of our Reſolutions, till they prove effectual and victorious. And this Grace God hath promiſed he will not deny to us, when we are thus diſpoſed for it; "He will give his Holy Spirit to them that aſk it; — He will not quench the ſmoking Flax, nor break the bruiſed Reed, until he bring forth Judgment unto Victory."

All that now remains is to apply this to ourſelves: which I ſhall endeavour at, agreeably to the different Ages and Diſpoſitions of Men. — And,

Firſt, The Difficulty of reforming evil Habits, though it may ſeem to be rather a Diſcouragement from Repentance, is yet a very proper, and ought to be a moſt prevailing Motive to it.

They who are in this Condition ſhould conſider, that as is the Difficulty, ſo is the Danger; Heaven and Happineſs retire from them, as they from Goodneſs; they ſtand upon the Brink of Deſtruction, and are every Moment expoſed to the worſt of Evils, from which they cannot ſave themſelves without great Reſolution and Diligence. Every Day their Retreat grows more dangerous and difficult, and their Delays make-work for a deeper and longer Repentance.

The divine Wiſdom has thought proper to ſet theſe Terrors before us, not to drive us to Deſpair, but to awaken in us thoſe Powers of the Soul which are weakened by Sin.

He who can be made fully ſenſible of theſe Truths, may force his Way through a thouſand Obſtacles, and perform things which could ſcarcely be expected; may be one of thoſe happy Ones who "was dead, and is alive again;" who "was loſt, and is found;" and who cauſeth "Joy in Heaven," and on Earth, by his unexpected Reformation. (*)

An Attempt to grow better is a laudable Endeavour; he that doth one virtuous Action, may proceed to more (‡), and may hope for the Bleſſing and Aſſiſtance of God, who loves and approves every thing that is good, and by whom theſe very firſt Beginnings of Repentance are wrought in us. (†) Add

(*) There being no Medium between Virtue and Vice, our forſaking of Sin is the firſt Step towards our Proficiency in Virtue: the Foundation of a religious Life, and upon which it naturally riſes, is "Repentance from dead Works:" ſo that, as they who would learn the *modern Philoſophy*, are adviſed to diveſt themſelves, as much as poſſible, of all former Notions and Prejudices, in like Manner, he that would be inſtructed in the Art of Holy-Living, muſt, by Way of a previous and neceſſary Qualification, entirely forſake and renounce his Sins.

(‡) *Dimidium Facti, qui bene cœpit, habet.*

(†) See John xv. 5.

Add to this, that the Pleaſure of ſubduing an evil Habit, is not only nobler, but greater by far than any that is to be had in the moſt tranſporting Moments of their Gratification; Self-denial being the moſt exalted Pleaſure, and the Conqueſt of evil Habits the moſt glorious Triumph. (*)

It is true, evil Habits are not to be rooted out at once, nor vicious Cuſtoms to be overcome in a Moment. So long therefore as a Man does not return wilfully and deliberately into the Habit of Sin, many Surpriſes and Interruptions in the Struggle with a cuſtomary Vice may be conſiſtent with the Progreſs of Repentance: but it is THEN only that it becomes compleat and effectual, when the evil Habit is ſo entirely rooted out, that the Man thence-forward obeys the Commandments of God without looking back, and turns no more to the Sins he has condemned.

In a Word, — If thoſe that have made the greateſt Proficiency in Religion, and "whoſe Faces are ſet (as it were) towards Sion," are ſtill ſenſible of a great many Frailties, and find the Seeds of Corruption ever putting-out afreſh; — If it be ſo difficult to ſuch advanced Chriſtians to keep themſelves always upon their Guard againſt the Attacks or Surprize of Temptation from a corrupt World, and the Powers of Darkneſs; how much

(*) —— —— *Felix cui vitæ Voluptas*
Tarda dedit, longi quem non fregêre Dolores.
Serm. CCCXLIX.

much more does it concern thoſe who are engaged in a wicked Courſe of Life, under the Temptations of the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, to watch all Opportunities of renewing themſelves again to Repentance?

This is certain, and every Man that obſerves what paſſes within him, experiences the Truth of it, that the longer we continue under the Power of any Sinful Paſſion, the more Ground it gains upon us, and we are, at once, the leſs able, and leſs willing to reſiſt it.

The ſooner, therefore, we ſet ourſelves to overcome our Evil Habits, the eaſier will the Practice of it be, and the more ſure our Victory over our Enemies. On the other Hand, if through the Want of a virtuous Education, or from ill Examples, and our own vicious Inclinations, we have been early drawn into ſinful Practices, and have ſtill continued in them; if, in the Spring and Seed-time of Life we have ſlept, and ſuffered the Enemy to ſow his Tares, and choack the good Seed and Principles of Religion in us, then, certainly we ought, nay, we muſt (if ever we hope to recover ourſelves,) double our Diligence in rooting them out, and applying ourſelves immediately to ſo neceſſary a Work, without Loſs of Time, "To-day, while it is called To-day;" for, who knows how ſoon "the Night may come, in which no Man can work;" and which, at beſt, is a very unfit Seaſon for ſo important a Con-

Concern: ſufficient for the Night (when we are alarmed by the Approaches of Death) will be the Evil there-of. Good Men, who have ſpent their Days well, in the Service of God, will then have enough to do to bear the Diſorders and Pains of Sickneſs, and to die with a juſt Compoſure, and Reſignation of Mind.

What Confuſion! what Diſtraction of Mind, then, muſt an old Sinner then be in, when "the Pains of Hell take hold upon him?" – A Sinner! who for a long Time has lived in a wicked and impenitent State of Life, and never thought of watching or ſtanding upon his Guard, till the Enemy is got into his Poſſeſſions, and ſtands ready to ſeize him! – But,

2dly, There are Others who ſincerely profeſs the Chriſtian Religion; who fear God, and deſire to be in His Favour; but whoſe Lives are not ſo conformable to their Belief, as they ought to be.

Such Perſons ſhould ſeriouſly conſider the Difficulty of reforming evil Habits, and the extreme Danger of That State. — For,

Though it be not their preſent Condition, yet if they uſe not timely Caution, ſad Effects may enſue. (*)

If

(*) —— —— *Sero Medicina paratur,*
Cum Mala per longas invaluêre Moras.
He that declines Remedy till he is weakened by the Diſeaſe, is bold too long, and wiſe too late. Serm. CCCXLIX.

If they improve not, they will, of Courſe, degenerate. (*) If they indulge themſelves in ſmaller Offences, they will be inſenſibly led on to a ſetled Careleſſneſs and Diſobedience.

Such as they are now, were thoſe alſo once who are now the moſt devoted Slaves to their Vices; for, no One is perfectly wicked at once. (‡) They, whoſe Amendment is repreſented in the Text as almoſt impoſſible, were once divided between Good and Evil, and purſued neither ſteadily. "The Things which they did, they approved not, but approved of the things which they did not;" they entertained Shame, and felt Remorſe for their Offences, and propoſed to amend their Lives.

Thus it was with them at firſt, till, by Degrees the Deceitfulneſs of Sin infatuated them, and left in them no Diſpoſition to Righteouſneſs. Theſe

(*) *Non aliter quàm qui adverſo vix Flumine Lembum,*
Remigiis ſubigit: ſi Brachia fortè remiſit,
Atque illum in præceps prono rapit Alveus Amni.
So the Boat's brawny Crew the Current ſtem,
And, ſlow advancing, ſtruggle with the Stream;
But if they ſlack their Hands, or ceaſe to ſtrive,
Then down the Flood with headlong Haſte they drive.

(‡) Wickedneſs comes by Degrees, as well as Virtue.

Nemo unquàm fuit repentè turpiſſimus.

Nemo in Vitio a primo Ortu fuit, ſed ſuâ quiſque Culpâ, improbus.
Sunt medii quidàm Motus Animorum; quibus ſi malè utaris, ſunt Vitia; ſin aliter, Virtutes erunt.

Theſe ſad Examples ſhould be a Warning to all thoſe whoſe Obedience is yet imperfect, and ſhadowed with Defects.

The Tyranny of evil Habits, and the eaſy Deſcent from an unſteady Virtue to them, ſhould excite us to correct in ourſelves every thing which our Conſciences condemn: to ſet about it inſtantly, "To-day, whilſt it is called To-day;" whilſt we may hope to have Time and Strength to complete the Undertaking; and whilſt Piety appears yet amiable to us, and not difficult of Acceſs. For,

There is no Man, who allows himſelf in the known habitual Practice of any one Sin, that can certainly tell where he ſhall make a Stand, or whether, by Degrees, he may not be drawn on to commit ſtill greater Impieties, till, in the Event, they occaſion his final Obduracy.

It is much eaſier not to begin a bad Courſe, than, after having begun it, to retreat from it: our corrupt Hearts, when once in Motion, are like the raging Sea, to which we can ſet no Bounds, nor ſay, "hither ſhalt thou come, and no further."

The only good Security, therefore, we can have, that we ſhall not run into all Manner of Sin, is to avoid every Sin: and how artfully ſoever it comes diſguiſed, (according to the Apoſtle's Exhortation,) to "abſtain from all Appearances of it." Vice

Vice may eaſily be diſcouraged at firſt. It is like a ſlight Diſeaſe, which, if early taken-care of, is ſoon cured, but grows dangerous by being neglected: if we "give-way to preſumptuous Sins, they will quickly get the Dominion over us." (*) Sin is of a deceitful Nature, and ſtrangely gains on Men, when they yield to it; and as there is a Connection of one Virtue with another, ſo are Vices alſo linked together; one Sin draws many after it. Let us therefore reſiſt the Beginnings of Sin, (‡) becauſe THEN we have the moſt Power, and the Sin is the leaſt.

If we poſſeſs not this Power, we ſhall be the Prey of every looſe Inclination that chanceth to ariſe. Pampered by continual Indulgence, all our Paſſions will become mutinous and headſtrong. Deſire, not Reaſon, will be the ruling Principle of our Conduct.

As, therefore, we would keep our Paſſions within due Bounds, we muſt betimes accuſtom them to know the Reins. We muſt not wait till ſome critical Occaſion for the Exerciſe of Self-denial occur. In vain we ſhall attempt to act with Authority, if our firſt Eſſay be made when Temptation has inflamed the Mind.

In

(*) *Conſuetudo Mali tenet infanabile multos.*

It is eaſier to preſerve Health, than to recover it; and to prevent Diſeaſes, than to cure them. We ſhould therefore check our Paſſions betimes, as involuntary Motions are invincible.

(‡) *Principiis obſta, &c.* See the Note, Page 283.

In cooler Hours, we muſt ſometimes abridge our Enjoyment even of what is innocent. – In the midſt of lawful Pleaſures, we muſt maintain Moderation, Abſtemiouſneſs and Self-command. The Obſervance of this Diſcipline is the only Method of ſupporting Reaſon in its proper Aſcendant. For, if we allow ourſelves always to ſtretch to the utmoſt Point of Innocence and Safety, beyond That Point we ſhall infallibly be hurried, when Paſſion ſhall ariſe in its Might to ſhake the Heart. — And,

For our Furtherance herein, let us particularly avoid all ſuch Objects as are apt to excite Paſſions which we know to be predominate within us; as ſoon as we find the Tempeſt riſing, let us have Recourſe to every proper Method, either of allaying its Violence, or of eſcaping to a calmer Shore; let us ſtudy to conquer one Paſſion by Means of ſome other that is of leſs dangerous Tendency; and never account any thing ſmall or trivial which is in Hazard of introducing Diſorder into our Frame; let us never make light of any Deſire which we feel gaining ſuch Progreſs as to threaten entire Dominion. Blandiſhing it will appear at the firſt. As a gentle and innocent Emotion, it may ſteal into the Heart; but as it advances, it is likely to "pierce us thro with many Sorrows;" – What we indulged as a favourite Amuſement, will ſhortly become a ſerious

Buſineſs; and, in the End, may prove the Burden of our Life. Moſt of our Paſſions flatter us in their Riſe: but their Beginnings are dangerous; their Growth is imperceptible; and the Evils which they carry in their Train lie concealed, till their Dominion is eſtabliſhed.

As to the very beſt of Men, Reflections upon this Subject may warn them to be upon their Guard; that, after they have ſet out well, and proceeded well, they fail not at laſt, nor loſe a Reward ſo near at Hand. The beſt of Men may find Benefit from all Kinds of Motives to Religion; even from thoſe which ſeem only deſigned for the Profligate.

Whilſt they are Men, they are ſubject to Infirmity, and liable to Temptation, from the Beginning to the End of their Lives. God, indeed, never with-holds his Grace from thoſe that lead a godly Life; but ſtill, we ought not to preſume upon our own Strength. Tho we are not in a ſinful, but in a holy and religious State; "Tho we are not of the Night, nor of Darkneſs;" yet, "let us not ſleep as do others, but let us watch and be ſober;" and, tho we "think we ſtand, yet let us take heed leaſt we fall." Good Men have juſt Cauſe, indeed, to hope that they ſhall never forſake God; but, to keep them ſtedfaſt herein, let them remember what is threatened "when the righteous Man turneth away from his

his Righteouſneſs," and be exceeding thankful to God, by whoſe Bleſſing they are free from that heavy Bondage of the Habit of Sin, and Strangers to the ſad Train of Evils attending it.

When they ſee the deplorable Condition of thoſe who are accuſtomed to ſin, (whoſe Amendment is ſo neceſſary, and Repentance difficult,) they will ſurely be moved with Pity. But,

To this compaſſionate Concern will naturally be added a great Satisfaction in their own Minds, when they conſider what Miſery they have avoided, and what Advantages they have preſerved and ſecured.

Laſtly, From the Doctrine before us we may find this ſingular Encouragement to Well-doing, that, by a Perſeverance in our Duty, we may make Righteouſneſs habitual to us, and not leſs pleaſant than profitable.

After we have practiſed good Actions a while, they become eaſy; and, when they are eaſy, we begin to take Pleaſure in them; and, when they pleaſe us, we do them frequently; and, by Frequency of Acts, a thing grows into a Habit; and, ſo far as any thing is natural, ſo far it is neceſſary, and we can hardly do otherwiſe: nay, we do it many Times when we do not think of it. Indeed,

God hath not ſo dealt with us, that whilſt the Paſſage from Vice to Virtue is difficult, the Paſſage from

Virtue to Vice ſhould be eaſy: No. There is, in this Reſpect, not much Difference in Habits; and, if it be not altogether, it is yet almoſt as hard to turn from Righteouſneſs to Sin, as it is to turn from Sin to Righteouſneſs. (*)

There are Thoſe who have repreſented Religion as wholly conſiſting of Self-denial and Pain: but without Reaſon.

Some Caſes will happen to the beſt of Men, in which Duty and Deſire will be at Variance. But, In general, he who is accuſtomed to ſerve God, will ſerve him by Choice, and with Eaſe & Satisfaction. (†)

To be good againſt the Bent of the Heart, and by Violence continually offered to the Paſſions, is the Condition of One who has contracted vicious Habits, and begins to get the better of them: This laborious Conqueſt is greatly to be commended.

To be good by Temper and Diſpoſition is the Conſequence

(*) *Quo ſemel eſt imbuta, recens ſervabit Odorem, Teſta, diu.* —— See No. 447. of the Spectator.

(†) *Oderunt peccare Boni Virtutis Amore.*

As a Man may ſin himſelf into ſuch a Situation, that he dare ſcarce either look at himſelf, or think of himſelf; every Reflection giving him Pain, and every Recollection Shame and Remorſe: ſo by good Deeds, and virtuous Habits, he may improve his Mind to ſuch a Degree, as to find Joy and Happineſs ſpringing up continually within his own Breaſt, and become highly ſatisfied from himſelf.

sequence of a regular and constant Obedience, and is much more excellent.

Nor indeed is this Temper to be acquired without diligent Care, and long Application. (*) For, As we are not born wicked, so neither are we born good.

We must not therefore expect to delight in Virtue, till we have made it habitual, by a right Use of Reason, and by a Power over the Affections, gradually obtained: — A Habit and Disposition this so absolutely necessary to influence the whole Life, and beautify every particular Action; to overbalance and repel every opposite evil Inclination; that a Man deservedly procures the lasting Epithets of good, or bad, as he appears either slayed by, or regardless of it.

Thus, from the pernicious Nature of sinful Habits, every Christian may draw Inferences suited to his own State; may find Motives to Repentance and Improvement, or Encouragements to Perseverance; or a timely Warning to set out wisely in the Beginning of his Days, and early to "chuse the good Part which will not easily be taken away from him."

(*) —— *Serie venit Usus ab Annis.*

Sermon

SERMON CCCLI.

Early Education, the beſt Preſervative from evil Habits.

Prov. xxii. 6. "Train up a Child in the Way he "ſhoud go, and when he is old he will not depart "from it."

There is no Duty of greater Concern to Religion, and to the good Order of the World, than the due and careful Education of Children, and the training up the riſing Generation; according to the right or ill Obſervance of which we muſt expect both of them either to flouriſh or decay in ſucceeding Times: This, as it is a Duty of the greateſt Importance, ſo, I am afraid, is moſt generally neglected.

Parents are by Nature and Scripture intruſted with their Children, bound in Conſcience to endeavour that the Being, which they gave them, prove not a miſerable One: and are in Prudence to provide, that when they grow up, they may be a Comfort and Credit to them, and not a Curſe. — And yet,

How

How commonly is the ornamental and ſuperficial Part of their Education the only one regarded; (*) and their Inſtruction, in Point of Duty and Morals, is ſcarce ever, or, at beſt, but ſlightly attended to; and Men too often ſit down contented whilſt they who are neareſt, and ought to be deareſt, to them are wicked, wretched, and deſpicable; or, if they eſcape in this World, may hereafter be miſerable forever. (‡)

However, this is certain that Parents muſt one Day account for all their Neglects of this Kind, and for all other Parts of their Families, ſo far as they have the Charge of them.

To enforce and confirm which, in Order to the Reformation

(*) Our Converſation and Intercourſe with the World is, in many Reſpects, a Seminary for Vice. From our Infancy, from the firſt unfolding of Reaſon we are accuſtomed to hear the Pleaſures of Wealth and Honour extolled. From our earlieſt Youth the Pageantry and Riches of the World are propoſed to us as the chief Aim of our future Life. Thus educated, it is no Wonder theſe glittering Baubles ſo eaſily captivate our Affections. Thus trained up, it is no Wonder the World and its gay Scenes have ſo great an Influence on our Conduct. Breathing naturally a contagious Air, it is impoſſible for us to eſcape the contaminating Effluvia.

See No. 66, of the Spectator.

(‡) An induſtrious and virtuous Education of Children is a better Inheritance for them, than a great Eſtate. To what Purpoſe is it to heap up Riches, and have no Concern what Manner of Heirs we leave them to? Wiſdom is better without an Inheritance, than an Inheritance without Wiſdom. Serm. CCCLI.

formation of ſo evil a Conduct, are theſe Words of Solomon in the Text, and which alſo Reaſon and Experience do abundantly confirm: the Good of all around us, and of ourſelves alſo, depending upon it; and which, therefore, cannot be neglected, but to the general and exceeding Hurt of Mankind.

The Influence of Morals is great; and of Inſtruction alſo, whether good or bad. As Thoſe under us are taught, ſo, in all Probability, will they "teach thoſe that come after them," even to perpetual Generations.

All the Extravagancies of the moſt profligate Life are nothing elſe but the more conſummated Follies and Diſorders of either a miſ-taught, or neglected Youth. All the public Outrages of a deſtroying Tyranny and Oppreſſion are but childiſh Appetites let alone till they are ungovernable. (*)

Children,

(*) Our greateſt Vices derive their firſt Propenſity from our moſt tender Infancy, and our principal Education depends upon our *then* Inſtruction; and yet how many Parents are there who applaud and cheriſh the firſt Sparks of Pertneſs, Treachery, and Deceit in their Children, as Marks of Spirit and Penetration, not conſidering that Theſe are the true Seeds of Cruelty, Tyranny, and Treaſon; they bud and put-out here, and afterwards ſhoot-up and grow into a prodigious Bulk, being cultivated and improved by Cuſtom.

It is, therefore, a very dangerous Miſtake to excuſe theſe vile Inclinations, upon the Tenderneſs of their Age, and the Trivialneſs of the Subject.

We

Children therefore, ſhould be moulded early, while their Tempers are yet pliant and ductile; for, it is infinitely eaſier to prevent ill Habits, than to maſter them.

It ſhould be conſidered alſo that we have the Seeds of Virtue in us, as well as of Vice; and whenever we take a wrong Bias, it is not out of a moral Incapacity to do better, but for Want of careful Management and Diſcipline to ſet us right at firſt. The Care of Education, therefore, is of the higheſt Moment – as all the Advantages or Miſcarriages of our Life are dependent on it.

It is the Duty of Parents therefore to infuſe into the untainted Youth early Notices of Juſtice and Honor, that ſo the poſſible Advantages of good Parts may not take an evil Turn, or be perverted to unworthy Purpoſes.

It is Education alone that can mend Nature, and improve the Gifts and Talents of that great Benefactreſs.

We are either made or marred in our Education; and Governments as well as private Families are concerned in the Conſequence of it; wicked Diſpoſitions, therefore, ſhould be checked betimes, for when once they ſettle into Habits, they grow incurable. More People come to infamous Deaths for Want of timely Inſtruction, Diſcipline and Correction, than upon any incurable Pravity of Nature; and it is mightily the Fault of Parents, Guardians, Tutors, and Governors, that ſo many Men miſcarry. *Ut quiſque ſuum vult eſſe, ita eſt.* Serm. CCCLI.

defactress. (*) Has she given us a competent Share of

(*) No Instance can be produced, from Adam to the present Day, of a single human Being, brought up apart from all Instruction, who ever spoke or understood. The State, indeed, is unnatural, and One into which Man cannot fall but by Accident. In the common Course of things, Providence has been pleased to ordain that he should be born in Society, and have those about him who never fail to

(under) [illegible]

Ut Visus accipit Lumen [illegible] ciplinis liberalibus ad reliqua Philosophiæ Mysteria reddatur perspicax.

Wisdom is begot by Nature, nourished by Experience, and brought up by Learning. Art polishes and improves Nature.

'Tis Education makes the Man.

——— *Ingenuas didicisse fideliter Artes*
Emollit Mores, nec sinit esse feros.

Bona Educatio, et studiosa Institutio promovet Naturæ Bonitatem, sustinet, extollit, auget.

Many things imperfect by Nature, are made perfect by Wisdom. He that wanteth Knowledge, Science and Nurture, is but the Shape of a Man; tho never so well beautified with the Gifts of Nature.

Satius est fieri Mendicum quàm indoctum; quòd Ille tantùm Pecuniis egeat, Hic verò Humanitate. Educatio est prima, secunda, tertia Pars Vitæ; sine quâ omnis Doctrina est veluti armata Injustitia. Homo sine Disciplinâ ferax est et agrestis.

It is better to be unborn, than untaught; for Ignorance is the Root of Misfortune. — *Ut Terra, si excolatur, varias Opes profert in Usus humanos; neglecta, Spinis et Vepribus obducitur; ità, Hominis Ingenium, si excolatur optimis Studiis, plurimas edit Virtutes; sin negligas, variis occupatur Vitiis.* Indeed,

We need no stronger Incentives to Learning, than to know what Figures we shall make in the World with this great Accomplishment. Let us but cast our Eyes abroad, and see how the Gentleman

of Senſe and Reaſon? Education carries up our Senſe to Wiſdom, and our Reaſon to Judgment.

It is the learned Alchymiſt, that purges away our Droſs, and ſublimes our whole Diſpoſition, it enobles our whole Nature, and teaches us in every Science; in general and particular Duties; to worſhip Heaven, to honour our Parents, to reverence our Elders, to ſubmit

ſleman is improved by the Scholar: how, by the Labour of a few Years of Erudition he ſtands poſſeſſed of Advantages that will adhere to him as long as he lives: what exalted Notions he entertains of his Creator's Omnipotence, and Indulgence to Man! what a wide Scene of Nature, and her Operations, is opened to his View; what Grounds it gives him of Admiration and Delight! how is his Taſte of Enjoyment refined! and how is he made capable of being charmed, and of charming in his Turn, with communicated Knowledge!

Nobility, Riches, State, and Supremacy can procure us a cuſtomary Reſpect, and make us the Idols of an unthinking Croud; but Knowledge and Learning alone recommend us to the Love of thoſe in a ſuperior Claſs, who admire more the Merits of our Underſtanding, than all the Advantages of our Birth and Fortune.

O! quàm compoſitum reddit omnem Corporis Statum, nec non et Mentis Habitum Diſciplina. Cervicem ſubmittit, ponit Supercilia, componit Vultum, ligat Oculos, Cachinnos cohibet, moderatur Linguam, frænat Gulam, ſedat Iram, format Inceſſum.

Filius Artibus et Literis erudiendus eſt, ut non in Theatro ſedeat Lapis ſuper Lapidem. Qui educat, Pater magis eſt, quàm qui genuit; Hic enim ut eſſem, Ille autem ut præclare Diſciplinâ inſtitutus eſſem, Author fuit. Præceptores efficiunt, ut ſimus boni, eruditi, beati, et conſummati. — There is nothing ſo much worth as a Mind well-inſtructed. *Duplum vident qui didicerunt literas.* See No. 215, of the Spectator.

to teach him as much as they themſelves know; their Language, and the Notions current among them. Theſe he learns; and if he be taught no more, he knows no more.

The human Soul without Education, is like Marble in a Quarry, which ſhews, &c. (under)

Quarry, which ſhews none of its inherent Beauties till the Skill of the Poliſher fetches out the Colours, and diſcovers the various ornamental Clouds that run through the Body of it.

Education draws out to View every latent Virtue, which, without ſuch Helps, would never be able to make their Appearance.

Ut Viſus accipit Lumen ſuum a circumfuſo Aere; ita Animus ex Diſciplinis liberalibus ad reliqua Philoſophiæ Myſteria reddatur perſpicax.

Wiſdom is begot by Nature, nouriſhed by Experience, and brought up by Learning. Art poliſhes and improves Nature.

'Tis Education makes the Man.

——— *Ingenuas didiciſſe fideliter Artes*
Emollit Mores, nec ſinit eſſe feros.

Bona Educatio, et ſtudioſa Inſtitutio promovet Naturæ Bonitatem, ſuſtinet, extollit, auget.

Many things imperfect by Nature, are made perfect by Wiſdom. He that wanteth Knowledge, Science and Nurture, is but the Shape of a Man; tho never ſo well beautified with the Gifts of Nature.

Satius eſt fieri Mendicum quàm indoctum; quòd Ille tantùm Pecuniis egeat, Hic verò Humanitate. Educatio eſt prima, ſecunda, tertia Pars Vitæ; ſine quâ omnis Doctrina eſt veluti armata Injuſtitia. Homo ſine Diſciplinâ ferox eſt et agreſtis.

It is better to be unborn, than untaught; for Ignorance is the Root of Misfortune. — *Ut Terra, ſi excolatur, varias Opes profert in Uſus humanos; neglecta, Spinis et Vepribus obducitur; ità, Hominis Ingenium, ſi excolatur optimis Studiis, plurimas edit Virtutes; ſin negligas, variis occupatur Vitiis.* Indeed,

We need no ſtronger Incentives to Learning, than to know what Figures we ſhall make in the World with this great Accompliſhment. Let us but caſt our Eyes abroad, and ſee how the Gen-

tleman

Senſe and Reaſon? Education carries up our Senſe Wiſdom, and our Reaſon to Judgment.

It is the learned Alchymiſt, that purges away our Droſs, and ſublimes our whole Diſpoſition, it enobles our whole Nature, and teaches us in every Science; in general and particular Duties; to worſhip Heaven, to honour our Parents, to reverence our Elders, to ſubmit

—

tleman is improved by the Scholar: how, by the Labour of a few Years of Erudition he ſtands poſſeſſed of Advantages that will adhere to him as long as he lives; what exalted Notions he entertains of his Creator's Omnipotence, and Indulgence to Man! what a wide Scene of Nature, and her Operations, is opened to his View; what Grounds it gives him of Admiration and Delight! how is his Taſte of Enjoyment refined! and how is he made capable of being charmed, and of charming in his Turn, with communicated Knowledge!

Nobility, Riches, State, and Supremacy can procure us a cuſtomary Reſpect, and make us the Idols of an unthinking Croud; but Knowledge and Learning alone recommend us to the Love of thoſe in a ſuperior Claſs, who admire more the Merits of our Underſtanding, than all the Advantages of our Birth and Fortune.

O! quàm compoſitum reddit omnem Corporis Statum, nec non et Mentis Habitum Diſciplina. Cervicem ſubmittit, ponit ſupercilia, componit Vultum, regat Oculos, Cachinnos cohibet, moderatur Linguam, frænat Gulam, ſedat Iram, formatque Inceſſum.

Filius Artibus et Literis erudiendus eſt, ut non in Theatro ſedeat Lapis ſuper Lapidem. Qui educat, Pater magis eſt, quàm qui genuit; Hic enim ut eſſem, Ille autem ut præclare Diſciplinâ inſtitutus eſſem, Labor fuit. Præceptores efficiunt, ut ſimus boni, eruditi, beati, et conſummati. — There is nothing ſo much worth as a Mind well-inſtructed. *Duplum vident qui didicerunt Literas.* See No. 215, of the Spectator.

Serm. CCCLI.

mit ourſelves to the Laws, to obey our Governors, to love our Friends, to be affectionate to our Relations, affable to our Equals, and not inſolently injurious to our Inferiors; It ſtrikes-in with Philoſophy in many Inſtances, teaches us not to be over-joyed in Proſperity, nor too much dejected in Adverſity, not to be diſſolute in our Pleaſures, nor in Anger to be tranſported to a Fury that is brutal. — Indeed,

We riſe above one another in the Eſteem of the World by different Degrees of Perfection, proportioned to the Want or Advantage of a liberal Education.

There is not a wider Difference betwixt Man and Beaſt, than betwixt Man and Man. And! to what is this Difference owing, but to the diſtinguiſhed Improvements of the Mind by Study and Meditation? Without theſe Helps, no Diſtinction of Faculties will render us conſpicuous. (*)

We cannot, therefore, do a greater Injury, or a more malicious Deſpite to future Generations, than to be negligent herein: (*) For, where Perſons are taught nothing,

(*) Our Countrymen ſo, in Queſt of a New Continent, to viſit the Extremities of the old Ones, and the diſtant Iſles of the South-Sea, returned with Accounts which confirm what we have obſerved, and may ſerve to convince, that *Man is born*, as the Scripture expreſſes it, *like a wild Aſs's Colt*; and without Education, will continue [illegible] Capacities only, and is in Reality [illegible] by inſtruction.

[illegible] Sentiment of Pity for our [illegible] Condition is truly deplorable, with an

(other)

nothing, and guarded againſt nothing, will they not, of Courſe, be in Danger of every thing? – And have we not Seducers among us to every Vice, and to almoſt every Error? — And,

There cannot be a greater Encouragement hereto, than to conſider, that though our Beginnings at preſent are but ſmall, yet, by continual Increaſe, in Time, "our Sons may grow-up as the tender Plants," and even "ſtand before Kings;" be the Head of Church and State: "and our Daughters be as the poliſhed Corners of the Temple." Only let us be careful to lay That Foundation which is neceſſary to it, in Wiſdom, in Inſtruction, and Righteouſneſs. (*) For,

The

d Prejudice from it. It is an Evil, that, as it were, ſtarves Poſterity, and defrauds our Country of thoſe Perſons, who, with due Care, might make an eminent Figure in their reſpective Poſts of Life: for, if we will look round with impartial Eyes, we ſhall be convinced, that there are indeed, but very few, to whom Nature has been ſo unkind, that they are not capable of ſhining in ſome Science or other. There is a certain Bias towards Knowledge in every Mind, which may be ſtrengthened and improved by proper Applications.

(*) The Neceſſity and Importance of a virtuous Education, are ſufficient Motives to induce the ſenſible and judicious Parent, early to inculcate the greateſt Reverence and Reſpect for Religion, Virtue, and Morality, in the tender Breaſts of his young Offspring.

It is not, therefore, for every empty Pedant to undertake ſo dif-

mit ourſelves to the Laws, to obey our Governors, to love our Friends, to be affectionate to our Relations, affable to our Equals, and not inſolently injurious to our Inferiors; It ſtrikes-in with Philoſophy in many Inſtances, teaches us not to be over-joyed in Proſperity, nor too much dejected in Adverſity, not to be diſſolute in our Pleaſures, nor in Anger to be tranſported to a Fury that is brutal. — Indeed,

We riſe above one another in the Eſteem of the World by different Degrees of Perfection, proportioned to the Want or Advantage of a liberal Education.

There is not a wider Difference betwixt Man and Beaſt, than betwixt Man and Man. And! to what is this Difference owing, but to the diſtinguiſhed Improvements of the Mind by Study and Meditation? Without theſe Helps, no Diſtinction of Faculties will render us conſpicuous. (*)

We cannot, therefore, do a greater Injury, or a more

Endeavour to relieve it: and one at the ſame Time of Gratitude to our Heavenly Father, who hath caſt our Lot on a fairer Ground.

Great Souls are not diſtinguiſhed by having leſs Paſſion and more Virtue, but by having nobler and greater Deſigns than the Vulgar, thro' the Improvement of their Talents, and the Capacities given them.

(‡) The Want of Education is not a private Injury alone to the neglected Infant; but the Public likewiſe, in ſome Degree, ſuſtains

nothing, and guarded againſt nothing, will they not, of Courſe, be in Danger of every thing? – And have we not Seducers among us to every Vice, and to almoſt every Error? — And,

There cannot be a greater Encouragement hereto, than to conſider, that though our Beginnings at preſent are but ſmall, yet, by continual Increaſe, in Time, "our Sons may grow-up as the tender Plants," and even "ſtand before Kings;" be the Head of Church and State: "and our Daughters be as the poliſhed Corners of the Temple." Only let us be careful to lay That Foundation which is neceſſary to it, in Wiſdom, in Inſtruction, and Righteouſneſs. (*) For,

The

a Prejudice from it. It is an Evil, that, as it were, ſtarves Poſterity, and defrauds our Country of thoſe Perſons, who, with due Care, might make an eminent Figure in their reſpective Poſts of Life: for, if we will look round with impartial Eyes, we ſhall be convinced, that there are indeed, but very few, to whom Nature is been ſo unkind, that they are not capable of ſhining in ſome Science or other. There is a certain Bias towards Knowledge in every Mind, which may be ſtrengthened and improved by proper Applications.

(*) The Neceſſity and Importance of a virtuous Education, are ſufficient Motives to induce the ſenſible and judicious Parent, early to inculcate the greateſt Reverence and Reſpect for Religion, Virtue, and Morality, in the tender Breaſts of his young Offspring.

It is not, therefore, for every empty Pedant to undertake ſo difficult

The Spring of Life is that critical Inſtant which muſt

ficult a Province as the Education of Youth; "To rear the tender Mind, to teach the young Ideas how to ſhoot, and to ſet the wayward Paſſions right. Delightful Taſk!" To do this rightly, requires a critical Nicety both of Wit and Judgment, to find out the Genius and Propenſions of a Child, and to divide ſo accurately, betwixt the Good and the Evil, the Gracious and Perverſe, as to hit the preciſe Medium of encouraging the One, without diſcouraging the other; and, this Faculty of diſcerning is not enough of itſelf, without a watchful Aſſiduity of Application. The juſt Seaſon of doing things muſt be hit, and all Accidents obſerved and improved; for weak Minds are to be as narrowly attended as ſick Bodies. To ſay nothing of the infinite Curioſity of the Operation in the forming of our Lives and Manners; that not one Man of a thouſand is competently qualified for the Office. A good School-maſter is One who has as much the Intereſt of his Scholars at Heart as his own; who ſtudies to make Learning a Pleaſure, and not a Taſk; and is as deſirous of promoting the daily Practice of True Religion, with a Love of Virtue and Piety, amongſt thoſe under his Care, as to bring them into an early Knowledge of the ſeveral Branches of uſeful and ornamental Literature.

The Qualifications neceſſary to conſtitute a good Tutor, are, a thorough Acquaintance with the human Mind, an extenſive Knowledge of Science in general, and an unfeigned Eſteem of, and an earneſt Solicitude for, the Advancement of Chriſtianity, and the Encouragement of early Wiſdom and Prudence in particular; together with a tender and humane Temper and Diſpoſition of Mind, not too gentle, or ſevere, but whilſt he maintains Awe, on the one Hand, he preſerves, at the ſame Time, Love and Reverence on the other - ready to puniſh the Firſt Appearances of Vice with becoming Indignation, and to reward Virtue with the greateſt Approbati-

on

must either confirm or blaſt the Hopes of all ſucceeding

ing

on and Pleaſure, with ſo gentle a Softneſs of Addreſs, that he may not hazard either the ſtifling or the quenching of generous Inclinations, by bearing too hard upon them, or the licentiating of any thing that is coarſe and vulgar, out of a fooliſh Facility, or miſtaken Pity. *Omne vitium vertitur in Vitium. Nihil eſt ſædius Præceptore furioſo, qui cum deberet eſſe manſuetus et humilis ad omnes, a contrà, torvo Vultu, tremontibus Labiis, rugatâ Fronte, effrenatis Convitiis, Facie inter Ruborem et Pallorem variatâ, Clamore proſtrepitat; errantes non tàm a Bono retrahit, quàm ad Malum ſuâ Sævitiâ præcipitat.*

He muſt have ſtudied Children long, that is capable of teaching them well. Every good Scholar is not a good Maſter, He muſt be a Man of invincible Patience, and ſingular Obſervation; diligent and ſober; not too familiar, nor reſerved; neither amorous, nor fantaſtick; juſt, without Fierceneſs; and merciful, without Fondneſs; he muſt commend, without Flattery; chide, without Contumely; and correct, without Paſſion; be chearful, without Levity; affable, without Fawning; grave, without Moroſeneſs; merry, without Folly. He ſhould be patient, humble, and meek, to paſs by, diſſemble and bear with many Impertinences, Dulneſſes, and Forgetfulneſs; He muſt endure many Contempts, Paſſions, and evil Words. Beſides theſe Qualifications, he ſhould have Experience of foreign Parts, underſtand Learning and Sciences, be well-born, of a good Preſence and Addreſs, and decently appareled, which will procure him Reſpect from his Charge, and facilitate the Performance of his Duty.—*Veſtis Virum facit.* See No. 150, of the Spectator.

Under ſuch a Maſter what Scholar would not improve in every thing praiſeworthy & commendable? At the Feet of ſuch a Gamaliel, what Youth would not become an Ornament to Society, a Bleſſing to the Nation, and a Pattern of good Works to all around him?

ing Seasons: It is the proper and only Time for Erudition.

The natural Idiot, and most untoward Disposition alone, can be Proof against the well-digested and pleasurable Instructions of such an amiable Teacher.—But O!

How few are there, in the present Age, who enter on that arduous and important Task, the Education of the rising Generation, with the above necessary and valuable Endowments. See No. 157, of the Spectator, and the first Part of No. 168.

How trifling a Number of those, who make the forming the Minds, and rectifying the Judgments and Inclinations of their Pupils, their chief Pursuit and constant Endeavours? no Wonder we see daily such Ignoramus's come from the Schools, when we consider how many bad and ill-qualified Tutors there are, who, with an insufficient Number of Assistants to attend properly to the Conduct, Behaviour & Progress of their numerous Pupils, consult only their own Benefit, by using every Method Avarice or Hypocrisy can suggest to increase their Wealth; regardless of the real and essential Requisites absolutely needful to the Office they bear, and the Station they have placed themselves in, take upon them a Work of the greatest Consequence to the future Happiness and Emolument of the rising Generation, and of the utmost Moment and Importance to the Trade and Commerce of the Kingdom.

A bad Master, in all Probability, will make all who are under him as blame-worthy as himself.

As every Person, therefore, who builds a House should first compute the Cost, whether he be able to finish it; so every One who sets-up for a Tutor, should first examine himself whether he is properly qualified for it; and not think himself so, because he can just read and write; but attentively peruse the above Description, and reflect within himself, "Can I lay my Hand on my Heart, and say, with the Approbation of Conscience, I AM THE MAN. *Usque Tui Judex, usque Magister eris.* Accept

dition. If it be neglected THEN, it will be too late when Maturity hath rendered the Mind ſtubborn and inflexible. Children, like tender Oziers, take the Lead, and always grow as they are firſt formed; like ſoftened Wax, (*) they will receive the firſt Impreſſions,

Accept not an Office, then, for which thou art not qualified, leſt he who knoweth more of it, deſpiſe thee. Inſtruct not another in That wherein thou thyſelf art ignorant, when he ſeeth it he will upbraid thee.

"Be ſure yourſelf, and your own Reach to know,
"How far your Genius, Taſte, and Learning go;
"Launch not beyond your Depth." ———

Whether a private or publick Education is beſt, we add, that a *private* One ſeems the moſt natural for the forming a virtuous Man. A *publick* School fits Better in giving a manly Aſſurance, and an early Knowledge in the Ways of the World; beſides, Children there frequently contract ſuch Friendſhips, as are of Service to them, all the following Parts of their Lives. See Knox's Eſſays, No. 88 On forming Connections: and No. 313. of the Spectator.

Priſci Heroes in Diſciplinam doctorum Hominum Filios ſuos ſtudioſè tradiderunt. Socrates docuit Xenophontem et Platonem; Alexandrum magnum docuit Ariſtotales; Timotheum, Canonis optimi Imperatoris Filium, Iſocrates; Epaminondam, Lyſis Pythagoreus; rectè ſentientes Ornamentum maximum eſſe rectam Educationem.

Thoſe who educate Children well, are more to be honoured than their Parents: for the Former only give them Life, but the Latter well-living. *Facit Parentes Bonitas, non Neceſſitas.*

(*) *Ut Gypſum aut Argilla, dum eſt uda, in quamvis Imaginem facilè ſequitur Fingentis Manum; ità rudes Adoleſcentiæ Animi, ad omnem Diſciplinam ſunt idonii.* Serm. CCCLI.

'Tis

ons; thro' the Tenderneſs of their Age, the Freeneſs and Unprejudicedneſs of their Minds, they are moſt receptive of theſe things; more ſupple to be formed, (*) more at Leiſure to be dealt with, and more impartial to receive Impreſſions that are good: It is THEN that Truths of a moral and religious Nature find their Way moſt eaſily into the Underſtanding, make the deepeſt Impreſſion in the Memory, and take the moſt laſting Hold of the Affections: It is THEN good Principles are moſt readily acquired; and Principles THEN acquired are leaſt liable to be over-powered or loſt, but will abide with them from the Virtue of Prepoſſeſſion, from the natural Force of Cuſtom, and from the Promiſe and

'Tis Education forms the vulgar Mind;
Juſt as the Twig is bent, the Tree's inclin'd.

Nihil felicius diſcitur, quàm quod ab ipſâ ſtatim Pueritiâ diſcitur.

Children are but as blank Paper, ready indifferently for any Impreſſion, good or bad, (for they take all upon Credit,) and it is much in the Power of the firſt Comer to write what Character on it he pleaſes; ſo that one Step out of the Way in the Inſtitution, is enough to deſtroy the Peace and Reputation of a whole Life.

(*) Old Age is indocile and untractable: if ancient Perſons have been put in a wrong Way at firſt, the Force of a long contracted Habit is ſo ſtrong, and their Indiſpoſition to learn, and Averſion to be taught, ſo violent, that there is no Hopes of reducing them to the Right. *Senex Pſittacus negligit Ferulam. Ut molli Materiæ facilè Sigillum imprimitur; ſi dureſcat, non item: ità Puerorum Ingenia facilè quam vis recipient Diſciplinam; ſi Ætate dureſcunt, non item.*

and Engagement of God to assist them in it, if they are not wanting to themselves. But, if we suffer ill Principles to get ground on Infancy, Vice to corrupt, or Passion to pervert Reason, in that unguarded Age; when we have once made an ill Child, it is a foolish Expectation to promise ourselves he will prove a good Man. It is in vain to flatter ourselves that as Sense strengthens, and Judgment grows ripe in them, they will correct in themselves the faulty Indulgences of their childish Years, or at least be better seasoned by Age for the Precepts we can give them against Folly or Immorality.

This is a Supposition most erroneous in itself, and fatal in its Consequences; for how can we expect sweet Waters, when we ourselves have first poisoned the Fountain? And, He who is not used to submit his Will to the Reason of others when he is young, will scarce hearken or submit to his own, when he is of an Age to make use of it; — And! what Kind of a Man such an One is like to prove, is easy to fore-see.

But, could we admit, that this happy Change might be effected at approaching Maturity, shall we dare to promise ourselves Life to That Day, and that Heaven will spare us purposely on Earth for this procrastinated Reformation?

Since then so much depends upon Education, great

Care ſhould be taken to form Children to the Principles of Religion: The Biaſs ſhould be ſet right at firſt, and the Mind prepoſſeſſed, as it were, for the Intereſt of Virtue.

This is the Way to ſmooth the Paſſage to an happy Life, to reconcile Appetite to Reaſon, and to make the Affections more manageable afterwards. For the Motion is ſtrongly directed, and the Bent taken from the firſt Impreſſion; and Cuſtom will make a good Practice as eaſy as a bad one. For, as in Child-hood the Memory is ſtrong, and the Body capable of Application; ſo, as yet, the Mind is not overcharged with Cares, the Power of Intereſt is not grown-up, and the Baits of Pleaſure being ſomewhat out of Sight, they are unſeized by the Prevalency of Habit, and the Infection of ill Company.

Without an early Care and Attention, therefore, we are as good as loſt from our firſt Breath; for the Principles that we imbibe at this early Time, we commonly carry with us to the Grave; (*) It is Education that makes the Man. If

(*) *Bonæ Artes et Doctrina ubivis Gentium ſunt in magno Pretio; nec poſſunt ullâ Fortunæ Tempeſtate eripi.*

What we learn in Youth, to That alone
In Age we are by Second Nature prone.
Quæ ſemel eſt imbuta recens ſervabit Odorem
Teſta diu. —— —— —— —— *Nil*

If Parents do their Duty herein, God will not keep back their Reward, "When ſuch are old, they will not depart from it."

This early Inſtruction of Children hath ſeveral Advantages, upon which we may reaſonably ground the Aſſertion before us: — Religion and Virtue have here the Advantage of the firſt Poſſeſſion — and are ſtrengthened by Habit and Cuſtom.

The Mind of Man is an active Principle, and will be employed. As ſoon as Reaſon begins to put forth, and Underſtanding to exerciſe itſelf, we diſcover a natural Thirſt after Knowledge: and, if it hath not the Waters of Life, and the pure Streams of Goodneſs to allay that Thirſt, it will ſeek to quench it in the impure Pleaſures of the World.

It

Nil non mortale tenemus
Præteris exceptis Ingenioque Bonis.

Doctrina et Virtus inæſtimabilia ſunt Divitiæ; nec enim eripi poſſunt, nec gravantur Circumferentium. Veras Divitias eripit Nemo. Ut Laurus ſola virent perpetuo, ſic Doctrinæ Famæ non fanſcit, neque marceſcit. Qui ſi bonis Literis et Artibus inſtruxit Puer, ſingularia boni Viri Officia præſtabit Senex. Learning continueth when all other worldly Wealth is waſted.

Ut a currente Flumine tantum habes, quantum hauris; ita, ex Annis ſemper euntibus, nihil accipis, niſi quod in Rei duraturæ cellocaris.

Ut Medicina ſalubertima, ni applicatur, non admittit Vulneris Dolorem; ita Tempus, Res pretioſſima, ni bene diſpenſatur, nullum affert Commodum.

Serm. CCCLI.

It is a happy thing to be principled, and (if I may ſo ſpeak) prejudiced the better Way, and that Religion ſhould get the firſt Poſſeſſion of our Hearts. (*)

Poſſeſſion is a great Point before vicious Inclinations ſpring up, and grow into Strength and Habit, to be a Prevention, or, at leaſt, a Counterbalance againſt them. Again,

Good Education gives likewiſe the Advantage of Habit and Cuſtom; which is of great Force. It is a Sort of Second Nature; and, next to Nature itſelf, a Principle of the greateſt Power. (†) Indeed,

When Children are grown to Men, to Years of Senſe, of Reaſon and Underſtanding, they ſhould take care that they do not owe their Religion only to Cuſtom;

(*) Should this Proceeding be called Inſtilling of Prejudices, we ſee not any thing ſo very formidable in the Charge. If Youth be by Nature in ſome Degree prejudiced againſt Virtue and Goodneſs, and would be much more ſo by Cuſtom and Example, what Method can be better ſuited to the Exigencies of our preſent Condition, than that of ſeaſonably counteracting thoſe Prejudices by others of a more ſalutary Tendency, and more agreeable to the genuine and undepraved Conſtitution of our Minds, ſuch as are calculated to reſtore our Reaſon to its juſt Pre-eminence, and to reinſtate Conſcience in that Dominion for which it was originally deſigned? Or where can be the mighty Harm of reſcuing thoſe Souls "from the Snare of the Devil, who would otherwiſe be taken captive by him at his Will," and of rendering them "Veſſels unto Honour, ſanctified and meet for their Maſter's Uſe, and prepared unto every good Work."

(†) See the Force of this, Page 189—191.

ſom; but ſhould, upon a due Examination of the Grounds of it, as far as they are capable of doing it, make it their own free Choice.

But yet, till That Time, there is no Reaſon why the beſt Religion in the World ſhould be denied this greateſt Advantage of all others. It is certainly a great Happineſs for Children to be inclined to That, which, when they come to underſtand themſelves, they would freely chooſe, if they were indifferent; – but an Indifferency cannot be preſerved in Children: and therefore ſince they will certainly be biaſſed one Way or other: there is all the Reaſon in the World why we ſhould endeavour to biaſs them to the beſt. Parents, indeed, may often miſtake what is beſt; but, if they love their Children, they cannot but wiſh and endeavour that they may be good, and do what is moſt beneficial for them.

It is of the laſt Importance therefore to ſeaſon the firſt Steps of Youth with a due Education, which ſeldom dies in a Mind that has received an early Tincture of it. Though it may ſeem extinguiſhed for awhile, by the Cares of this World, the Heats of Youth, or the Allurements of Vice; yet, it generally breaks out and diſcovers itſelf again, as ſoon as Diſcretion, Conſideration, Age, or Misfortunes, have brought the

Man to himſelf; the Fire may for a while be covered, but cannot be entirely extinguiſhed (*)

This is the conſequent Fruit and Benefit of good Education; generally we ſay, and for the moſt Part. Inſtances indeed there have been, and always will be, of Perverſeneſs; yet, theſe are confeſſedly very rare, and may be owing perhaps to ſome Miſcarriage, or imprudent

(*) *Quæ in Puritiâ diſtimus, diutiſſimè firmiſquè meminiſſe ſolemus. Si Ætas puerilis Artes et Diſciplinas, ſi Mores pios et Modeſtiam cum Laude quaſi materna primitùs imbiberit, eos nunquàm obliviſcitur. Diſcuſſiùs illud eradicatur quod rudes Animi perbiberunt. Ut quæ ſemel ſit imbuta recens ſervabit Odorem Teſta diù: ità, quæ rudibus Annis edocti ſimus, tenaciſſimè hærent* —See the Note, Page 306, 307.

We have the Force of an early Piety remarkably exemplified in Caſe of Obediah. He was Governor of the Houſe of Ahab; a King who had ſold himſelf to work Wickedneſs beyond all that were before him, and whoſe Wife Jezebel ſeems to have had nothing ſo much at Heart as the Deſtruction of all the Lord's Prophets. Theſe were trying Circumſtances. For the firſt Favourite of ſuch a Maſter, and chief Officer in ſuch a Court, notwithſtanding his precarious Situation, and (as it were) in Deſpight of her Diſpleaſure on whoſe Favour its Continuance muſt have greatly depended, "to hide the Prophets of the Lord by fifty in a Cave, and to feed them with Bread and Water." This was a Proceeding not very reconcileable with the Maxims of worldly Policy. And yet, we ſhall ceaſe to wonder at a Conduct ſo uncommonly brave and generous, after he himſelf has explained the true Grounds of it, "I, thy Servant, fear the Lord from my Youth."

prudent Defect, and therefore adds rather to our greater Caution, than Neglect in it. (*) This

(*) *Virtutem Doctrina parat. Fructus feras mollite colendo.*

There are Millions of Instances that evidence the Force of Industry and necessary Application; I shall content myself with one Comparison, which is obvious to every Man's Thoughts, and which seems truly applicable to the present Purpose.

A Man's Ground may of itself be good; yet, if it be unmanured, it may contract Barrenness; and, by how much the better it was naturally, by so much it will be rendered the worse, if thro' Carelessness, it be neglected. On the other Side, Let a Man's Ground be more than ordinarily rough; yet Experience shews us, that if it be well regarded, it will soon be made capable of answering his Labour. Thus a good natural Capacity may be impaired by Slothfulness and Disuse, whilst the dull and heavy may be improved by Instructions and Industry.

Ut sterilis Ager Culturâ fit bonus, ità tardum Ingenium Studio et Arte emendatur. Our Minds must be cultivated, as well as our Plants.

Quos signi imponit Assello. Ingenio segni, et Equi segnibus fieri solet, Stimulos adhibe. Cognatum parvi Flagellum. Fortiùs utere Loris; Non hunc enim tibi Corporis Excusatio, sed Laboris Occasio data est.

Ut Vasa angusto Ore difficiliùs recipient, sed retinent certiùs Liquorem; ità Ingenia, quæ tardiùs percipiunt, serò reminiscuntur tenaciùs.

Quædam Ingenia nullo Studio eriguntur. Est ubi Pater impensam, Præceptor Operam, et Puer Tempus amittit. Ut sapientissimi Parentes non rarò gignunt stultissimos Filios; ità docti Præceptores sæpè amittunt indoctos Discipulos. It is impossible to raise Learning out of a Mind, where Nature has not planted it. Nature is sometimes so perverse, that all the Governors in the Universe will never make this Youth a complete Gentleman, *Nec Genium habet, nec Ingenium; Plumbo gravior et Pondere levior. In illum quidvis harum Rerum convenit, quæ*

This then (not always, and infallibly, but very frequently) is, and may moſt probably be preſumed to be the Fruit and happy Effect of it; Though there may be ſeveral Exceptions made, and Inſtances given, to the contrary; yet, this doth not infringe the general Truth. Moſt of the wiſe Sayings of Solomon are to be underſtood with this Limitation; ſo that the exact Meaning of the Words before us, is,

"That the careful, prudent, and religious Education of Children hath, for the moſt Part, a very great and good Influence upon the whole Courſe of their Lives."

Good Habits (being more difficult of Acceſs than thoſe of evil) are not eaſily attained, nor ripened into Maturity at once, nor without Pains and repeated Eſſays, (*) being "born (as holy Job expreſſeth it) like wild Aſſes' Colts," unexperienced to every thing; and, what is ſtill worſe, if not ſet-right, will certainly go wrong; having Wills, as naturally perverſe, as their Underſtandings are dark. — Beſides, "The

Alia ſunt in Stultum; Candor, Stipes, Asinus, Plumbeus: in illum nihil poteſt, nam exſuperat ejus Stultitia hæc omnia. Others, again, are of ſo ductile a Diſpoſition, that they learn every thing without a Maſter. *Ut Trochus Piſcis ipſe ſibi, et ex ſeſe concipit; ita quidem Ingenii Facilitate ipſi Literarum Semina infundunt ſibi.* Theſe are without doubt the moſt accompliſhed Perſons. *Plurima ſunt, &c.* (under)

Ex Candi Culcemantum vile. Ex quovis Ligno non fit Mercurius.

Mihi Nihil fit. Invitâ Minervâ vil inſtandum eſt.

(*) Nos. 507, and 508, of the Spectator.

There is certainly great Diverſity in the Capacities of Children; and the Want of Diſcernment in Parents upon this Head, has often proved the Occaſion of many unhappy Soleciſms in the Buſineſs of Education. A Child of ſlow Underſtanding and weak Abilities, ſhall be deſtined to a ſuperior Profeſſion of Life, for which he has no Taſte, and in which it is impoſſible for him to excel; And in his Way to it, contrary to all Senſe and Reaſon, he ſhall be condemned to a long Courſe of Diſcipline, the moſt ſevere and humiliating; while another, poſſeſſed of ſhining Talents and an unconquerable Thirſt for Literature, ſhall have his Views croſſed, his Purſuits checked, and at length be thruſt into a Station of Life, wherein his whole Object is to the getting a Maintenance, or at moſt the getting a little ſordid Wealth. Whereas, Could the World be reformed into the Obedience of that famed Dictate, *FOLLOW NATURE*, which the Oracle of Delphos pronounced to Cicero, when he conſulted what Courſe of Studies he ſhould purſue, we ſhould ſee almoſt every Man as eminent in his proper Sphere, as Tully was in his.

The wiſe Creator has adapted the natural Genius of Mankind, with a ſurprizing and beautiful Variety, to the State in which they are placed in this World. To ſome he has given a Turn for intellectual Improvement, and the liberal Arts and Sciences; to others a Dexterity in Mechanics, and the ruder Arts neceſſary for the Support of human Life. And the Generality of Mankind may be capable of tolerable Improvements in any of theſe: But it is only they whom the God of Nature has formed for them, that will ſhine in them. *Sors cuivis Homini.* Every Man in his own Province. *Proprium Ingenio alius alium. Non omnia poſſumus omnes.*

(under)

"The Way wherein they ſhould go" is full of Difficulties and Dangers; which Uſe and Experience only, under proper Conduct and Guidance, can make eaſy and ſafe. (*)

To the foregoing Advantages, we may add, that by rectifying this great Work of Education, we ſhall make Correction in a Degree unneceſſary. Few want the laſt, who have not originally been wanting in the firſt. But even This, tho evil, while it is neceſſary, is good; and may have its Uſe, if not to the Sufferer, yet to him who ſeeth him ſuffer. Happy, if, whom Reaſon cannot reclaim, the Fear of Correction may! Happy for him who can profit at the eaſy Expence of another's Puniſhment, & by another's Stripes be healed. (‡)

Nay, We make no Doubt but the Care of Education may prevent in many Caſes Diſtraction too; in all thoſe Caſes which ariſe from irregular Paſſions, and, which is not the leaſt, nor leaſt dreadful Inſtance of Madneſs, from wild, and gloomy, and frightful Notions of the Author of our Being and Bleſſings.

Horrible it is for any Cauſe to ſee that exquiſite Piece of Architecture, the Mind of Man, like a ſhattered

(*) The Ways to Wickedneſs are many, plain, and common; but to Godlineſs but One, and that hard to find, becauſe it is but little trodden. See Matt. vii. 13, 14.

(‡) *Felix quem faciunt aliena Pericula cautum.*
Serm. CCCLI.

This then (not always, and infallibly, but very frequently) is, and may moſt probably be preſumed to be the Fruit and happy Effect of it; Though there may be ſeveral Exceptions made, and Inſtances given, to the contrary; yet, this doth not infringe the general Truth. Moſt of the wiſe Sayings of Solomon are to be underſtood with this Limitation; ſo that the exact Meaning of the Words before us, is,

"That the careful, prudent, and religious Education of Children hath, for the moſt Part, a very great and good Influence upon the whole Courſe of their Lives."

Good Habits (being more difficult of Acceſs than thoſe of evil) are not eaſily attained, nor ripened into Maturity at once, nor without Pains and repeated Eſſays, (*) being "born (as holy Job expreſſeth it) like wild Aſſes' Colts," unexperienced to every thing; and, what is ſtill worſe, if not ſet-right, will certainly go wrong; having Wills, as naturally perverſe, as their

Plurima ſunt Juvenum Diſcrimina, pulchrior ille,
Hoc atque ille alio, multùm hic robuſtior illo,
Sic valet ac Animis. ——— ———

Ego nec Studium, ſine divite Vena; nec rudis quid proſit video Ingenium.
Ex Candidi Cultoremantum mihi. Ex quovis Ligno non fit Mercurius.
E nihilo Nihil fit. Invitâ Minervâ nil [illegible].

(*) See No. 307, and 309, of the Spectator.

There is certainly great Diverſity in the Capacities of Children; and the Want of Diſcernment in Parents upon this Head, has often proved the Occaſion of many unhappy Soleciſms in the Buſineſs of Education. A Child of ſlow Underſtanding and weak Abilities, ſhall be deſtined to a ſuperior Profeſſion of Life, for which he has no Taſte, and in which it is impoſſible for him to excel; And in his Way to it, contrary to all Senſe and Reaſon, he ſhall be condemned to a long Courſe of Diſcipline, the moſt ſevere and humiliating; while another, poſſeſſed of ſhining Talents and an unconquerable Thirſt for Literature, ſhall have his Views croſſed, his Purſuits checked, and at length be thruſt into a Station of Life, wherein his whole Object is to the getting a Maintenance, or at moſt the getting a little ſordid Wealth. Whereas, Could the World be reformed into the Obedience of that famed Dictate, *FOLLOW NATURE*, which the Oracle of Delphos pronounced to Cicero, when he conſulted what Courſe of Studies he ſhould purſue, we ſhould ſee almoſt every Man as eminent in his proper Sphere, as Tully was in his.

The wiſe Creator has adapted the natural Genius of Mankind, with a ſurprizing and beautiful Variety, to the State in which they are placed in this World. To ſome he has given a Turn for intellectual Improvement, and the liberal Arts and Sciences; to others a Dexterity in Mechanics, and the ruder Arts neceſſary for the Support of human Life. And the Generality of Mankind may be capable of tolerable Improvements in any of theſe: But it is only they whom the God of Nature has formed for them, that will ſhine in them. *Sors cuivis Homini.* Every Man in his own Province. *Proprius Ingenio datus unicuique.* *Non omnia poſſumus omnes.*

(under)

"The Way wherein they ſhould go" is full of Difficulties and Dangers; which Uſe and Experience only, under proper Conduct and Guidance, can make eaſy and ſafe. (*)

To the foregoing Advantages, we may add, that by rectifying this great Work of Education, we ſhall make Correction in a Degree unneceſſary. Few want the laſt, who have not originally been wanting in the firſt. But even This, tho evil, while it is neceſſary, is good; and may have its Uſe, if not to the Sufferer, yet to him who ſeeth him ſuffer. Happy, if, whom Reaſon cannot reclaim, the Fear of Correction may! Happy for him who can profit at the eaſy Expence of another's Puniſhment, & by another's Stripes be healed. (‡)

Nay, We make no Doubt but the Care of Education may prevent in many Caſes Diſtraction too; in all thoſe Caſes which ariſe from irregular Paſſions, and, which is not the leaſt, nor leaſt dreadful Inſtance of Madneſs, from wild, and gloomy, and frightful Notions of the Author of our Being and Bleſſings.

Horrible it is for any Cauſe to ſee that exquiſite Piece of Architecture, the Mind of Man, like a ſhattered

(*) The Ways to Wickedneſs are many, plain, and common; but to Godlineſs but One, and that hard to find, becauſe it is but little trodden. See Matt. vii. 13, 14.

(‡) *Felix quem faciunt alterna Pericula cautum.*
Serm. CCCLI.

This then (not always, and infallibly, but very frequently) is, and may moſt probably be preſumed to be the Fruit and happy Effect of it. Though there may

There ſeems, indeed, a Sort of Æconomy in Providence, that One ſhall excel where another is defective, in Order to make Men more uſeful to each other, and mix them in Society. But, be this as it may, certainly nothing but Nature can qualify a Man for Learning. *Poeta naſcitur, non fit.* No One is obliged to think beyond his Capacity; and we never tranſgreſs the Bounds of good Senſe, but when we aim to go beyond it. We ſhould, rather, therefore correct thoſe Defects we are ſubject to by Nature, than aim at thoſe Excellencies and Perfections which we were never made for.

Quod cuique obtigit, id quiſque tenear. Undiquiſque is eſt, in quo virtus eſt, manenti, apud Deum. Tenenda eſt Vita quam Natura protexerit; nec ab illâ declinandum: illam ſequentibus, omnia facilia et expedita ſunt; conſtratum viventibus, non alia Vita eſt quam contrà Aquam nantibus. Naturam Ducem ſi ſequamur, nunquam aberrabimus. Nihil aliter eſt Gigantium Mors pugnare cum Diis, quam Naturæ repugnare. Ut Bos ad Aratrum adhibendus, Equus ad Currum; ità quiſque debet eam Vitæ Rationem capeſcere ad quam Naturâ ſit appoſitus. Quicquid Homini naturaliter inſitum eſt, eo uti decet, et quicquid agat, agere pro Viribus.

By how much the more wanting in Parts we are, by ſo much the more diligent we ought to be. See Knox's Eſſays, No. 53, On the Choice of a Profeſſion.

Weigh well your Talent for the Part you play;
Avoid Extremes, and chuſe the middle Way.

To avoid Miſtakes, then, we ſhould conſider well our Children's natural Abilities, and call in the Aſſiſtance of others, if needful, to that End. The Powers of Nature, like the Plants in our Gardens, gradually open, and by diligently watching their Progreſs, an Employment not a little pleaſing to a fond Parent, we ſhall quickly diſcern what Kind of Culture is the moſt for them, and give a good Gueſs to what Uſe they may be beſt applied when they arrive at Maturity. By various Ways we may come to an Idea of the particular Talent or Endowment which marks their mental Character, whether it be Imagination or Judgment, Ingenuity or Sagacity, Memory or Invention, Study or Action; and to the prevailing Caſt of their Minds we ſhould accommodate our Inſtructions and Modes of Education. This will greatly facilitate both our Buſineſs and

(under)

their

"The Way wherein they ſhould go" is full of Difficulties and Dangers; which Uſe and Experience only, under proper Conduct and Guidance, can make eaſy and ſafe. (*)

To the foregoing Advantages, we may add, that by facilifying this great Work of Education, we ſhall make Correction in a Degree unneceſſary. Few want the firſt, who have not originally been wanting in the firſt: But even This, tho evil, while it is neceſſary, is good; and may have its Uſe, if not to the Sufferer, yet to Him who ſeeth him ſuffer. Happy, if, whom Reaſon cannot reclaim, the Fear of Correction may! Happy he, him who can profit at the eaſy Expence of another's Puniſhment, & by another's Stripes be healed. (‡)

Nay, We make no Doubt but the Care of Education may prevent in many Caſes Diſtraction too; in all thoſe Caſes which ariſe from irregular Paſſions, and, which is not the leaſt, nor leaſt dreadful Inſtance of Sadneſs, from wild, and gloomy, and frightful Notions of the Author of our Being and Bleſſings.

Horrible it is for any Cauſe to ſee that exquiſite piece of Architecture, the Mind of Man, like a ſhattered

(*) The Ways to Wickedneſs are many, plain, and common; but to Godlineſs but One, and that hard to find, becauſe it is but little trodden. See Matt. vii. 13, 14.

(‡) *Felix quem faciunt aliena Pericula cautum.*
Serm. CCCLI.

This then (not always, and infallibly, but very frequently) is, and may moſt probably be preſumed to be the Fruit and happy Effect of it. Though there may

There ſeems, indeed, a Sort of Æconomy in Providence, that One ſhall excel where another is defective, in Order to make Men more uſeful to each other, and mix them in Society. But, be this as it may, certainly nothing but Nature can qualify a Man for Learning. *Poeta naſcitur, non fit.* No One is obliged to think beyond his Capacity; and we never tranſgreſs the Bounds of good Senſe, but when we aim to go beyond it. We ſhould, rather, therefore correct thoſe Defects we are ſubject to by Nature, than aim at thoſe Excellencies and Perfections which we were never made for.

Quod cuique obtigit, id quiſque teneat. Undiquaque ſe, in quo verſatus eſt, maneat, apud Deum. Tenenda eſt Via quam Natura præſtrinxit; nec ab illâ declinandum: illam ſequentibus, omnia facilia et expedita ſunt; contrariam viventibus, non alia Vita eſt quàm contrà Aquam navigantibus. Naturam Ducem ſi ſequamur, nunquàm aberrabimus. Nihil aliùd eſt Gigantium More pugnare cum Diis, quàm Naturæ repugnare. Ut Bos ad Aratrum adhibendus, Equus ad Currum; ita quiſque debet eam Vitæ Rationem capeſſere ad quam Natura ſit appoſitus. Quicquid Homini naturaliter inſitum eſt, eo uti decet, et quicquid agat, agere pro Viribus.

By how much the more wanting in Parts we are, by ſo much the more diligent we ought to be. See Knox's Eſſays, No. 53, On the Choice of a Profeſſion.

Weigh well your Talent for the Part you play;
Avoid Extremes, and chuſe the middle Way.

To avoid Miſtakes, then, we ſhould conſider well our Children's natural Abilities, and call in the Aſſiſtance of others, if needful, [illegible] The Powers of Nature, like the Plants in our Gardens. Thus gently leading them forward in the Path Nature hath pointed out for them, we ſhall, with the Bleſſing of God, ſucceſsfully conduct them to the Object of our Wiſh—to that Station of Life which Providence has deſigned them for; to the [illegible]

(*) See Page [illegible]

"The Way wherein they ſhould go" is full of Difficulties and Dangers; which Uſe and Experience only, under proper Conduct and Guidance, can make eaſy and ſafe. (*)

To the foregoing Advantages, we may add, that by effectifying this great Work of Education, we ſhall make Correction in a Degree unneceſſary. Few want the laſt, who have not originally been wanting in the firſt. But even This, tho evil, while it is neceſſary, is good; and may have its Uſe, if not to the Sufferer, yet to him who ſeeth him ſuffer. Happy, if, whom Reaſon cannot reclaim, the Fear of Correction may! Happy he him who can profit at the eaſy Expence of another's Puniſhment, & by another's Stripes be healed. (‡)

Nay, We make no Doubt but the Care of Education may prevent in many Caſes Diſtraction too; in all thoſe Caſes which ariſe from irregular Paſſions, and, which is not the leaſt, nor leaſt dreadful Inſtance of Sadneſs, from wild, and gloomy, and frightful Notions of the Author of our Being and Bleſſings.

Horrible it is for any Cauſe to ſee that exquiſite Piece of Architecture, the Mind of Man, like a ſhattered

(*) The Ways to Wickedneſs are many, plain, and common; but to Godlineſs but One, and that hard to find, becauſe it is but little trodden. See Matt. vii. 13, 14.

(‡) *Felix quem faciunt aliena Pericula cautum.*
Serm. CCCLI.

tered Temple, blaſted by that Flame, which ſhould at the ſame Time enlighten and comfort it, is yet more melancholy. O! guard us, Heaven, from that laſt Illuſion, that keeneſt Inſtrument of Hell, Deſpair!

O! prevent with Eaſe, what may be difficult to eradicate in ſuch unhappy Objects; who appear, indeed, like Men, but in Reality have nothing left of the human Nature, but the Miſeries to which it is ſubject, being baniſhed (as it were) from the Community, and from themſelves before their Time! Whereas,

Let the Mind be put under "the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord:" let holy Diſcipline cleanſe the Soil: let ſacred Inſtruction ſow it with the beſt Seed: let Skill and Vigilance dreſs the riſing Shoots, direct the young Ideas how to ſpread, and the way-ward Paſſions how to move: THEN, what a different State of the INNER Man will quickly take-place! Charity will breath her Sweets, and Hope expand her Bloſſoms: the perſonal Virtues diſplay their Graces, and the ſocial Ones their Fruits: the Sentiments become generous, the Carriage endearing, and the whole Life honourable and uſeful. (*) — In a Word, The

(*) *Fingit Equum tenerâ docilem Cervice Magiſter,*
Ire Viam quam monſtrat Eques. ———
Adeò in tenerîs aſſueſcere tanti eſt.
Of ſuch Avail is Cuſtom in tender Years.

The Principles we imbibe, and the Habits we contract, in our early

The Mind, without early Inſtruction, will in all Probability become like "the Vineyard of the Sluggard." If Youth are left to the Propenſities of their own depraved Will, what can we expect but the moſt luxuriant Growth of unruly Appetites; which in Time will break forth into all Irregularities; and render every Imagination of the Heart only evil continually. Such are the uſual Products of ſavage Nature! Such the Furniture of the uncultivated Soul! (*)

The firſt and epidemical Source of Miſery to Individuals and to Society is the Want of proper training in Infancy; Childhood being neglected, Youth becomes headſtrong, and advanced Age uſeleſs, often burthenſome, ſometimes even pernicious to the Community, and to ourſelves. Upon the Whole,

How

early Years, are not Matters of ſmall Moment, but of the utmoſt Conſequence imaginable. They not only give a tranſient and ſuperficial Tincture to our firſt Appearance in Life, but commonly ſtamp the Form of our whole future Conduct, and even of our eternal State.

(*) *Ut Ager, ſi non colatur, non ſolùm infrugiferus manet, verùm etiàm multa Sylveſtra producit: ità, Adoleſcens, Rationis capax, niſi Præceptis honeſtis exerceatur, non ſolùm non evadit bonus, ſed ad multa Vitia deflectitur. Negletis urenda Filix innaſcitur Agris.*

Ut Equus ferox abſque Frænis hùc et illùc Impetu fertur, ità Juventus Virtutem et ingenuas Literas non edocta, per Nefas invetitum ruit. Ut Mundus abſque Sole eſſet tenebroſa Confuſio; ità Juventus, ſine Præturis Inſtitutionis, ferox, agreſtis, et indomita. Serm. CCCLL.

How ſmall is the Difference in the Beginning between a bad Man and a good Man! How wide a Diſtance is made in the Progreſs, both to the Perſons themſelves, and thoſe with whom they are connected! Does not Nature plainly teach you this? Of two Seeds apparently equal, which you are ſowing, ſuppoſe of Wheat, or of ſome other, any other, Grain; how different is the Fate of them, as they are thrown into proper Soil, or dropped by the Way-ſide! Even ſo fares it with the Minds of Men.

Inſtruction being thus neceſſary, we are to conſider through what Hands it may be moſt advantageouſly conveyed. Through thoſe, perhaps it will be ſaid, of the Parents. One ſhould certainly imagine ſo at firſt Sight; but then all Parents are not able to inſtruct, having not been themſelves ſufficiently inſtructed. Thoſe of them who are able, may not be willing to ſubmit to the Taſk; while many, both able and willing, cannot find Leiſure from their neceſſary Buſineſs to undertake it. (*)

There is, beſides, another Difficulty in the Way. The Partiality and Fondneſs of the Tutor, when that Tutor is a Father, may often do the Pupil an Injury, the Effects of which will go with him through Life. To prevent this, the Spartans, by a Law of the State, took Children at a certain Age out of the Hands of their Parents, and placed them under other Maſters.

The

SERMON CCCLII.

On the ſame Subject.

Rules for it.

Prov. xxii. 6. "Train up a Child in the Way he "ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart "from it."

The great Importance of early Education, and the ſeveral Advantages of it; being already eſtabliſhed; proceed we now to the Methods to be made uſe of for the right Cultivation of it. And,

First, As "without the Bleſſing of the Lord, the Watchman waketh but in vain: and it is vain without it, for Men to riſe up early, and lie down late, and eat the Bread of Carefulneſs;" ſo here, Tho' the Advantages of Inſtruction are many and great, and Education ſo evidently neceſſary to attain them; yet we are not to truſt to Cultivation alone. It is the Bleſſing of the Almighty Huſbandman which imparts Succeſs to theſe Labours of Love, as well as to every other human Endeavour. If God "ſeal up the Windows of Hea-

ven,"

The Hebrews had their Schools of the Prophets; the Greeks and Romans their Academies and Gymnasia; and since the Revival of Learning in these latter Days, the western World has abounded with Schools and Universities; of which, without incurring the Charge of Self-adulation, we may truly say, none have exceeded those in our own Country.

In a public Education, the Means and Instruments necessary for the Acquisition of Learning are possessed in a more full and complete Manner. The Master can give his Time and his Thoughts wholly to the Work: constant and long Experience confers a Degree of Skill not otherwise to be attained. A Spirit of Emulation is excited in the Scholar, who goes on with more Sprightliness and Alacrity in the Company of his School-fellows, forgetting those that are behind, and pressing forward to those who are before, with the Determination of a Cæsar, that nothing is yet done, while any thing remains to be done. A regular Succession of Business, at stated Times, inures him to live by Rule, and forbids him to be idle; while the Discipline by which it is enforced, renders him healthy and hardy in Mind and Body. By being put so soon to manage and strive for himself, he is prepared for the World into which he must enter, and in which he must pass his Days; the various Tempers and Dispositions of his numerous Companions bring him acquainted with those of Mankind, among whom he is to pass them; and he forms Connections, which, by banishing Selfishness, by exchanging Offices of Friendship,

(under)

SERMON CCCLII.

On the ſame Subject.

Rules for it.

Prov. xxii. 6. "Train up a Child in the Way he "ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart "from it."

The great Importance of early Education, and the ſeveral Advantages of it, being already eſtabliſhed; proceed we now to the Methods to be made uſe of for the right Cultivation of it. And,

Firſt, As "without the Bleſſing of the Lord, the Watchman waketh but in vain: and it is vain without it, for Men to riſe up early, and lie down late, and eat the Bread of Carefulneſs;" ſo here, Tho' the Advantages of Inſtruction are many and great, and Education ſo evidently neceſſary to attain them; yet we are not to truſt to Cultivation alone. It is the Bleſſing of the Almighty Huſbandman which imparts Succeſs to theſe Labours of Love, as well as to every other human Endeavour. If God "ſeal up the Windows of Hea-

ven,"

The Hebrews had their Schools of the Prophets; the Greeks and Romans their Academies and Gymnasia; and since the Revival of Learning in these latter Days, the western World has abounded with Schools and Universities; of which, without incurring the Censure of Partiality, we may say, that they have been the Glory of this Nation. Nor can it be doubted, but that the Friendship, by mutual Assistance and Communication of Studies, as well as in many other Ways, contributed towards his passing them with Pleasure and Emolument. If all who are engaged in the Superintendance of our public Seminaries could only bestow equal Attention on the Learning and Morals of those under their Care, so that they might go forth good Men, as well as good Scholars, the Dispute between the Patrons of public and private Education would be, perhaps, in great Measure, at an End.

Sermon

(*) The Fault of Mr. Locke's Treatise is, that it supposes none of these Cases to happen, but that a Father shall always be at Liberty to take-care of his Son's Education. The same Fault is chargeable on the Plan of a very sensible and agreeable Instructress of a neighbouring Kingdom: with great Force of Genius and Goodness of Heart, she describes two Persons of noble Birth as giving up the World, and retiring for a Course of Years from public Life, that they might devote their Time and Fortune to the Education of their Children. Undoubtedly the Design is praise-worthy; they were excellently well employed; would to God, that many of their Rank were so employed, in every Kingdom upon Earth; but all cannot do it; the Scheme can never become general.

SERMON CCCLII.

On the same Subject.

Rules for it.

Prov. xxii. 6. "Train up a Child in the Way he "ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart "from it."

The great Importance of early Education, and the ſeveral Advantages of it; being already eſtabliſhed; proceed we now to the Methods to be made uſe of for the right Cultivation of it. And,

Firſt, As "without the Bleſſing of the Lord, the Watchman waketh but in vain: and it is vain without it, for Men to riſe up early, and lie down late, and eat the Bread of Careſulneſs;" ſo here, Tho' the Advantages of Inſtruction are many and great, and Education ſo evidently neceſſary to attain them; yet we are not to truſt to Cultivation alone. It is the Bleſſing of the Almighty Huſbandman which imparts Succeſs to theſe Labours of Love, as well as to every other human Endeavour. If God "ſeal up the Windows of Hea-

ven,"

ven," and command the Clouds to with-hold their Fatneſs, the beſt cultivated Land becomes a barren Deſert. If He reſtrain the Dew of his Heavenly Benediction, all human Endeavours miſcarry; the rational Plantation languiſhes: and our moſt pregnant Hopes, from Youths of the moſt promiſing Genius, prove abortive. "Their Root will be as Rottenneſs, and their Bloſſom will go-up as Duſt before us." Therefore, let Parents plant; let Tutors water; but let both look-up to the Father of Spirits for the deſired Increaſe.

But further, — After having recommended them to the Lord, and begged a Bleſſing upon all our Endeavours for them, let us ſet forward by a right Inſtruction and due Formation of their Lives and Manners.

And here, — We are, by Degrees, carefully to inſtruct them in the whole Compaſs of their Duty, both to God, their Neighbour, and Themſelves. (*) And,

In Order to do this more effectually, we muſt endeavour as well as we can, to diſcover the particular Temper and Diſpoſition of our Children, that we may ſuit and apply ourſelves to it in the beſt Manner, and ſo govern them in the moſt pleaſant and eaſieſt Way.

All Tempers and Diſpoſitions are not alike; ſome are more capable of one Excellency and Virtue than another,

(*) *Virtus maturè excolenda eſt.*

Inſtil Religion into your Child as ſoon as it can diſtinguiſh Sounds.

another, and ſome more ſtrongly inclined to particular Vices, theſe we are to obſerve, and accordingly apply our Care to the beſt Advantage; that where we diſcern in them any forward Inclinations to Good, we may caſt in ſuch Seeds and Principles, as, by their Suitableneſs to their particular Tempers we judge moſt likely to take ſooneſt and deepeſt Root: and when theſe are grown up, and have taken Poſſeſſion of the Soil, they will prepare it for the Seeds of other Virtues.

And ſo likewiſe when we diſcover in their Nature a more particular Diſpoſition and Leaning towards any thing which is bad, we muſt with great Diligence and Care apply ſuch Inſtructions, and plant ſuch Principles in them, as may be moſt effectual to alter this evil Diſpoſition of their Minds; that whilſt Nature is tender and flexible we may gently bend it the OTHER Way; (*) and it is almoſt incredible what ſtrange things by Prudence and Patience may be done towards the rectifying of a very perverſe and crooked Diſpoſition. (‡)

So that it is of very great Uſe to obſerve and diſcover the particular Tempers of Children, that in all our Inſtruction and Management of them we may apply ourſelves to their Nature and hit their peculiar Diſ-

(*) *Sinctenus eſt niſi Vas, quodcunque infundis, acceſſit.*

(‡) See Note (*), Page 278. Serm. CCCLII.

Diſpoſition; by this Means we may lead and draw them to their Duty in humane Ways, and ſuch as are much more agreeable to their Temper, than Conſtraint, and Neceſſity, which are harſh and diſagreeable.

Having thus paved the Way to our Inſtruction, let us implant in them thoſe Principles of Religion and Virtue as are moſt likely to have the beſt Influence upon the future Government of their Lives, and to be of continual and laſting Uſe to them. — Thus,

By being, at firſt, well inſtructed, they will be better able to direct and govern themſelves in theſe ſeveral Reſpects afterwards; — particularly we are to inſtruct them in the great and ſubſtantial Principles of Religion, leaving the ſmaller and nicer Points to their riper Years of Judgment and Diſcretion.

The Knowledge of God, and our Duty — the great Evil and Danger of Sin — the firm Belief of a future State, and of eternal Rewards and Puniſhments; Theſe are the prime Points of Religion, which, if early rooted in the Heart, will be of laſting Effect.

This Duty, God (ſpeaking of the Laws which He had given) very expreſsly and particularly charges the Jews, his peculiar People, with — "Thou ſhalt teach them diligently unto thy Children, and ſhalt talk of them when thou ſitteſt in thine Houſe, and when thou walkeſt by the Way: and when thou lieſt down, and when thou riſeſt up." — And, This,

This, God ſpeaks of Abraham, to his great Commendation — "I know him (ſaith God) that he will command his Children and his Houſehold after him to keep the Way of the Lord."

There muſt be great Care and Diligence uſed in the Whole of this — There muſt be "Line upon Line, and Precept upon Precept; here a little, and there a little," (as the Prophet expreſſeth it) and as they are able to bear it; (*) The Principles of Religion and Virtue muſt be inſtilled into them by ſuch Degrees, and in ſuch a Meaſure as they are capable of receiving them; till we have inſtructed them in the whole Will God, and in every Article of their Duty. (‡)

But,

(*) *Iterùm, iterùmque monebo.*
A good Leſſon cannot be repeated too often.
Nunquàm nimis dicitur, quod nunquàm ſatis dicitur.
Toties, quoties repetita, placebit.

See Phil. iii. 1.

In general, the Meaſures we take with Children to this End, ſhould be adapted to their Age, Capacities, and particular Turn of Mind. We ſhould begin with their Perceptions, not too haſtily reaſoning with them before they are capable of laying Propoſitions together, and inferring from them. Plain ſimple Ideas ſhould in the firſt Inſtance be held up to their View, as Truth & Falſehood, Pride and Humility, Love and Ill-will, Peace and Content, Courage and Cowardice, Modeſty and Impudence, Merit, Duty, and the like.

(under) When

ligion, it is the more eaſily remembered,

Diſpoſition; by this Means we may lead and draw them to their Duty in humane Ways, and ſuch as are much more agreeable to their Temper, than Conſtraint, and Neceſſity, which are harſh and diſagreeable.

Having thus paved the Way to our Inſtruction, let us implant in them thoſe Principles of Religion and Virtue as are moſt likely to have the beſt Influence upon the future Government of their Lives, and to be of continual and laſting Uſe to them. — Thus,

By being, at firſt, well inſtructed, they will be better able to direct and govern themſelves in theſe ſeveral Reſpects afterwards; — particularly we are to inſtruct them in the great and ſubſtantial Principles of Religion, leaving the ſmaller and nicer Points to their riper Years of Judgment and Diſcretion.

The Knowledge of God, and our Duty — the great Evil and Danger of Sin — the firm Belief of a future State, and of eternal Rewards and Puniſhments; Theſe are the prime Points of Religion, which, if early rooted in the Heart, will be of laſting Effect.

This Duty, God (ſpeaking of the Laws which He had given) very expreſsly and particularly charges the Jews, his peculiar People, with — "Thou ſhalt teach them diligently unto thy Children, and ſhalt talk of them when thou ſitteſt in thine Houſe, and when thou walkeſt by the Way: and when thou lieſt down, and when thou riſeſt up." — And, This,

This, God ſpeaks of Abraham, to his great Commendation — "I know him (ſaith God) that he will command his Children and his Houſehold after him to keep the Way of the Lord."

There muſt be great Care and Diligence uſed in the Whole of this — There muſt be "Line upon Line, and Precept upon Precept; here a little, and there a little," (as the Prophet expreſſeth it) and as they are able to bear it; (*) The Principles of Religion and Virtue muſt be inſtilled into them by ſuch Degrees, and in ſuch a Meaſure as they are capable of receiving them; till we have inſtructed them in the whole Will

When Reaſon begins to expand, the true Grounds of Chriſtian Virtues and their oppoſite Vices ſhould be explained to them; the real Excellence and Uſe of the former, and the wretched Deformity and Evil of the latter; the Notice God takes of theſe Matters, and his Diſpleaſure at the one, and Approbation of the other. And there are a thouſand Ways of impreſſing theſe Ideas on their Minds as may have a real and laſting Effect upon them.

(*) We cannot help obſerving here, the great Neceſſity and Uſefulneſs of *Catechiſing* Children to this Purpoſe; which hath a peculiar Advantage as to Children, becauſe they are ſubject to Forgetfulneſs and Want of Attention; againſt both which Catechiſing is a good Remedy; becauſe by Queſtions put to them, Children are forced to take-notice of what is taught, and muſt give ſome Anſwer to the Queſtion that is aſked; and a Catechiſm being ſhort, and containing in a little Compaſs the moſt neceſſary Principles of Religion, it is the more eaſily remembered.

But, After these Instructions are once given, we must not think that all our Work is done; but we are to see that they lead their Lives agreeably to them; so far, at least, as their Understanding and Age will permit.

The great Usefulness, and indeed the Necessity of it plainly appears by Experience. For it very seldom happens, that Children, which have not been catechised, have any clear and competent Knowledge of the Principles of Religion; and for Want of this, are incapable of receiving any great Benefit by Sermons, which suppose Persons to be in some Measure instructed before-hand in the main Principles of Religion. Besides, If they have no Principles of Religion fixed in them, they will become an easy Prey to Seducers. And we have had sad Experience of this in our Age; and among many other ill Effects of our late Civil Confusions, This is none of the least, that public Catechizing was almost wholly disused, and private too in most Families; for had Catechizing of Children been continued, it is very probable that this Age would have been infested with fewer Errors and with fewer Schisms; and that there would not have been so much Apostasy from the Fundamentals of Religion.

To this Method of teaching Children, we may add those instructive Notices that are conveyed to them by Glances, Insinuations, and Surprize, & under the Cover of some Allegory or Riddle, See No. 512, of the Spectator.

Naked Lessons and Precepts have nothing the Force that Images and Parables have upon our Minds and Affections. Besides, that the very Study to unriddle a Mystery, furnishes the Memory with more Tokens to remember it by. The Instructions which are given to Youth ought not to be tedious; for being pithy and short, they will the sooner hear them, and the better keep them.

Quicquid præcipies, esto brevis: ut cito Dicta
Percipiant Animi dociles, teneantque fideles.

The wretched Trash of Plays, Novels, and Romances with which the World is overrun, hath done infinite Mischief to the Morals of young People. It hath corrupted the Principles, enflamed the Imagination, and vitiated the Taste of thousands. With Books of this Sort a prudent Parent will not suffer the Closets of his Children to be disgraced. Nor yet, under the Pretence of taking-care

(under)

mit them; at all Times cherifhing the firft Step, and every Appearance to Virtue. (*)

Let them rather be taught to do well, than to talk well; rather to avoid what is evil, in all its Shapes and Appearances, and to practice their Duty in the ſeveral Inſtances of it, than (if it were poſſible) to "ſpeak with the Tongue both of Men and Angels:" — For, "unto Man, He ſaid, Behold, the Fear of the Lord, That is Wiſdom; and to depart from Evil, That is Underſtanding." (†)

This will be an exceeding Help to all our Inſtructions; and, without thus realizing them, they will moſt probably "return empty into our Boſoms."

Practical

(*) Encouragement is the Life of Action.

——— ——— ——— *Laudata Virtus*
Creſcit, & immenſum Gloria Calcar habet.

(†) Zenophon tells us, that the Perſians inſtead of making their Children learned, taught them to be virtuous: and inſtead of filling their Heads with fine Speculations, taught them Honeſty, and Sincerity, and Reſolution; and endeavoured to make them wiſe and valiant, juſt and temperate.

Licurgus alſo, in the Inſtitution of the Lacedemonian Common-Wealth, took no Care about Learning; but only about the Lives and Manners of their Children: Though doubtleſs Both, under the Conduct of true Wiſdom & Goodneſs, is beſt, as it will make them both wiſer and better Men; and therefore is not only an Ornament, but a greater Advantage to the better Government of any Society whatever.

But, After these Instructions are once given, we must not think that all our Work is done; but we are to see that they lead their Lives agreeably to them; so far, at least, as their Understanding and Age will permit

The great Usefulness, and indeed the Necessity of it plainly appears by Experience. For it very seldom happens, that Children, which have not been catechised, have any clear and competent Knowledge of the Principles of Religion; and for Want of this, are incapable of receiving any great Benefit by Sermons, which suppose Persons to be in some Measure instructed before-hand in the main Principles of Religion. Besides, If they have no Principles of Religion fixed in them, they will become an easy Prey to Seducers. And we have had sad Experience of this in our Age; and among many other ill Effects of our late Civil Confusions, This is none of the least, that public Catechizing was almost wholly disused, and private too in most Families; for had Catechizing of Children been continued, it is very probable that this Age would have been infested with fewer Errors and with fewer Schisms; and that there would not have been so much Apostasy from the Fundamentals of Religion.

To this Method of teaching Children, we may add those instructive Notices that are conveyed to them by Glances, Insinuations, and Surprize, & under the Cover of some Allegory or Riddle; see No. 512, of the Spectator.

Naked Lessons and Precepts have nothing the Force that Images and Parables have upon our Minds and Affections. Besides, that the very Study to unriddle a Mystery, furnishes the Memory with of their Morals, will he interdict the innocent Pleasures of Imagination. In the well-selected Writings of Poets, Historians, and Natural Philosophers, he will find a Fund of Entertainment for their leisure Hours; and to the Acquaintance of these Friends of Taste and Cheerfulness, as well as of intellectual & moral Improvement, he will gladly introduce them.

mit them; at all Times cheriſhing the firſt Step, and every Appearance to Virtue. (*)

Let them rather be taught to do well, than to talk well; rather to avoid what is evil, in all its Shapes and Appearances, and to practice their Duty in the ſeveral Inſtances of it, than (if it were poſſible) to "ſpeak with the Tongue both of Men and Angels:" — For, "unto Man, He ſaid, Behold, the Fear of the Lord, That is Wiſdom; and to depart from Evil, That is Underſtanding." (‡)

This will be an exceeding Help to all our Inſtructions; and, without thus realizing them, they will moſt probably "return empty into our Boſoms."

Practical

(*) Encouragement is the Life of Action.

——— ——— ——— *Laudata Virtus*
Crefcit, et immenſum Gloriæ Calcar habet.

(‡) Zenophon tells us, that the Perſians inſtead of making their Children learned, taught them to be virtuous: and inſtead of filling their Heads with fine Speculations, taught them Honeſty, and Sincerity, and Reſolution; and endeavoured to make them wiſe and valiant, juſt and temperate.

Licurgus alſo, in the Inſtitution of the Lacedemonian Common-Wealth, took no Care about Learning; but only about the Lives and Manners of their Children. Though doubtleſs Both, under the Conduct of true Wiſdom & Goodneſs, is beſt, as it will make them both wiſer and better Men; and therefore is not only an Ornament, but a greater Advantage to the better Government of any Society whatever.

Practical Inſtruction will make them "taſte and ſee" the Fitneſs and Propriety of things. — And, hereby underſtanding beſt, they will be careful to practiſe the moſt.

We do not pretend, indeed, that the Knowledge of Chriſtian Truths ſhall always, and every where, produce the practical Inference, and make thoſe who know them act, as if they had them ever in their Eye: but there can be no Doubt that they will influence as far as any moral Arguments can influence, and the more, as they are more intimately and habitually known; they are as an Anchor to the Soul, ſafe, and firm; it may be ſubject to be toſſed, notwithſtanding, by every little Storm, and to be in Danger from a great One: but no Violence can force it from its Hold. — Indeed,

Religion is not to be taught as an empty Speculation, but as a Rule to go by. Children are to be trained up early to act thoſe Parts for which Providence ſeems to have deſigned them in this Life, in Hope of being applauded in the next: they are to be habituated to do what they are born to do; at a Time when Impreſſions are eaſieſt to make, and, when once made, moſt difficult to eraſe.

Religion, thus early interwoven with their Employments, becomes the Colour of their Life. Their Duty and their Devotion go Hand in Hand. In what-

ever

ever honeſt Labour they are engaged, every Act of their Station is a reaſonable Service to God, and the lifting up of their Hands an acceptable Sacrifice.

Even as to the Poor, ſome Perſons have entertained wonderful Apprehenſions that Religion, and as much Learning as may help a Man to employ himſelf in it, may prove a great Obſtruction to Labour, and of Diſ-ſervice to the Public. — We know not what Religion this muſt be; we are ſure it cannot be the Chriſtian. A Religion, whoſe chief End is to teach us the Employment of every Talent, cannot lead us to neglect the Improvement of any; unleſs we can be led into Idleneſs and Injuſtice, by being laid under a double Obligation to Induſtry and Fidelity. Doubtleſs we ſhould not grudge the Poor the Knowledge of Letters, if it were but to have them able to read this ſhort Leſſon, which we fancy thoſe who ſcruple the Matter moſt, would have no Objection to ſee written in Letters of Gold in every Seminary of Inſtruction for the Poor.

Servants, obey in all things your Maſters, not with Eye-ſervice as Men-pleaſers, but in Singleneſs of Heart, fearing God: and whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to Men; knowing, that of the Lord ye ſhall receive the Reward of Inheritance: for ye ſerve the Lord Chriſt! But he that doth Wrong

ſhall receive for the Wrong he hath done; and there is no Reſpect of Perſons with God."

Others, again, are alarmed, leſt Reaſon ſhould ſuffer by the early Introduction of religious Prejudice.

Leave reaſonable Creatures, ſay they, to the Direction of their Reaſon; what have they to do with any Judgment but their own? Let their Religion be the Reſult of free Inquiry; it will be Time enough to fix upon One, when they have finiſhed the Other.

Theſe, we preſume, are Philoſophers, Profeſſors of Humanity in every Senſe, who, in Compaſſion to the Miſeries to which we are ſubjected by the Tyranny of Education, offer their generous Aid to free us from the Bondage of Prejudice. — Do they underſtand that Nature which they are ſo ready to relieve? — If they ſow no good Seed in the Minds of Children, what Inſurance have they againſt this wicked World, that it ſhall ſow no bad Seed in them? if they will not take the Pains to inculcate Habits of Religion into young People, who can ſay that they will not chooſe for themſelves other Habits, and of another Caſt? (*) Is it Reaſon then alone that governs in the Infancy of human Nature? Is there nothing of a lower Stamp, which is with Care, and Difficulty, by our Virtue, or by calling in a higher Power, to be regulated, if not ſubdued? — You are a Parent, ſuppoſe, of the Variety of Meats before you,

(*) See Page 307, 308.

you

you do not allow your Child to chooſe where & what he pleaſes, and in what Degree, taking it for granted that his Reaſon will direct him, and that there is no Danger of his being miſtaken? You are too wiſe to indulge his Appetite to the Deſtruction of his Health: — but is not the Interpoſition an Infringement on natural Liberty? It is; you muſt conſult, however, the Health of his Body: I will not think ſo meanly of you, as not to preſume you have at leaſt an equal Regard to the Strength of his Mind. Is there no Danger that his Taſte may lead him as much to his Hurt in his Amuſements, in his Opinions, in his Acquaintance? Do you leave him in Theſe to his Judgment, and to the Deciſions of his never-erring Reaſon, which, if not juſt now, will not fail, upon Experience, to remonſtrate? Let us ſee how far you may be able to correct what you are unwilling to prevent: let his Body be bent double for Want of Care, and bid him walk upright when he comes to a Senſe of his Deformity: will his Reaſon teach him to articulate? or to alter any diſagreeable Accent which he has imbibed? Ah, ſimple Wiſdom! What Huſbandman neglects the Seed-time, and expects the Harveſt? Let an unkindly Spring blaſt his Bloom, and when will that Autumn

ing in the Dew of Heaven from above; the Whole inveſted with its Foliage as a beautiful Garment, and crowned with its Fruit in the Season. Let us not frame our Ideas of human Nature by ſurveying an Infant or a Savage. Shew us the Man completely formed and perfected by a liberal, a learned, and a religious Education.

ſhall receive for the Wrong he hath done; and there is no Reſpect of Perſons with God."

Others, again, are alarmed, leſt Reaſon ſhould ſuffer by the early Introduction of religious Prejudice.

Leave reaſonable Creatures, ſay they, to the Direction of their Reaſon; what have they to do with any Judgment but their own? Let their Religion be the Reſult of free Inquiry; it will be Time enough to fix upon One, when they have finiſhed the Other.

Theſe, we preſume, are Philoſophers, Profeſſors of Humanity in every Senſe, who, in Compaſſion to the Miſeries to which we are ſubjected by the Tyranny of Education, offer their generous Aid to free us from the Bondage of Prejudice. — Do they underſtand that Nature which they are ſo ready to relieve? — If they ſow no good Seed in the Minds of Children, what Inſurance have they againſt this wicked World, that it ſhall ſow no bad Seed in them? if they will not take the Pains to inculcate Habits of Religion into young People, who can ſay that they will not chooſe for themſelves other Habits, and of another Caſt? (*) Is it Reaſon then alone that governs in the Infancy of human Nature? Is there nothing of a lower Stamp, which is with Care, and Difficulty, by our Virtue, or by calling in a higher Power, to be regulated, if not ſubdued? — You are a Parent, ſuppoſe, of the Variety of Meats before you,

you

(*) See Page 307, 308.

you do not allow your Child to chooſe where & what he pleaſes, and in what Degree, taking it for granted that his Reaſon will direct him, and that there is no Danger of his being miſtaken? You are too wiſe to indulge his Appetite to the Deſtruction of his Health: — but is not the Interpoſition an Infringement on natural Liberty? It is; you muſt conſult, however, the Health of his Body: I will not think ſo meanly of you, as not to preſume you have at leaſt an equal Regard to the Strength of his Mind. Is there no Danger that his Taſte may lead him as much to his Hurt in his Amuſements, in his Opinions, in his Acquaintance? Do you leave him in Theſe to his Judgment, and to the Deciſions of his never-erring Reaſon, which, if not juſt now, will not fail, upon Experience, to remonſtrate? Let us ſee how far you may be able to correct what you are unwilling to prevent: let his Body be bent double for Want of Care, and bid him walk upright when he comes to a Senſe of his Deformity: will his Reaſon teach him to articulate? or to alter any diſagreeable Accent which he has imbibed? Ah, ſimple Wiſdom! What Huſbandman neglects the Seed-time, and expects the Harveſt? Let an unkindly Spring blaſt his Bloom, and when will that Autumn come that will yield him Fruit? (*)

You fancie yourſelf all this while to abound in

(*) We might as well expect a Statuary to accompliſh himſelf in his Art, by looking all Day at a Block of Marble, becauſe out of that Block a Statue may be formed; ſhall we judge of a Plant, by contemplating the Seed from which it is to ſpring? No, let us view the Tree, its Root fixed in the Earth, and drawing Moiſture from beneath, its Trunk fully grown, its Branches expanded, and drinking (under)

ſhall receive for the Wrong he hath done; and there is no Reſpect of Perſons with God."

Others, again, are alarmed, leſt Reaſon ſhould ſuffer by the early Introduction of religious Prejudice.

Leave reaſonable Creatures, ſay they, to the Direction of their Reaſon; what have they to do with any Judgment but their own? Let their Religion be the Reſult of free Inquiry; it will be Time enough to fix upon One, when they have finiſhed the Other.

Theſe, we preſume, are Philoſophers, Profeſſors of Humanity in every Senſe, who, in Compaſſion to the Miſeries to which we are ſubjected by the Tyranny of Education, offer their generous Aid to free us from the Bondage of Prejudice. — Do they underſtand that Nature which they are ſo ready to relieve? — If they ſow no good Seed in the Minds of Children, what Inſurance have they againſt this wicked World, that it ſhall ſow no bad Seed in them? if they will not take the Pains to inculcate Habits of Religion into young People, who can ſay that they will not chooſe for themſelves other Habits, and of another Caſt? (*) Is it Reaſon then alone that governs in the Infancy of human Nature? Is there nothing of a lower Stamp, which is with Care, and Difficulty, by our Virtue, or by calling in a higher Power, to be regulated, if not ſubdued? — You are a Parent, ſuppoſe, of the Variety of Meats before you,

(*) See Page 307, 308.

you

you do not allow your Child to chooſe where & what he pleaſes, and in what Degree, taking it for granted that his Reaſon will direct him, and that there is no Danger of his being miſtaken? You are too wiſe to indulge his Appetite to the Deſtruction of his Health: — but is not the Interpoſition an Infringement on natural Liberty? It is; you muſt conſult, however, the Health of his Body: I will not think ſo meanly of you, as not to preſume you have at leaſt an equal Regard to the Strength of his Mind. Is there no Danger that his Taſte may lead him as much to his Hurt in his Amuſements, in his Opinions, in his Acquaintance? Do you leave him in Theſe to his Judgment, and to the Deciſions of his never-erring Reaſon, which, if not juſt now, will not fail, upon Experience, to remonſtrate? Let us ſee how far you may be able to correct what you are unwilling to prevent: let his Body be bent double for Want of Care, and bid him walk upright when he comes to a Senſe of his Deformity: will his Reaſon teach him to articulate? or to alter any diſagreeable Accent which he has imbibed? Ah, ſimple Wiſdom! What Huſbandman neglects the Seed-time, and expects the Harveſt? Let an unkindly Spring blaſt his Bloom, and when will that Autumn

ing in the Dew of Heaven from above; the Whole inveſted with its Foliage as a beautiful Garment, and crowned with its Fruit in the Seaſon. Let us not frame our Ideas of human Nature by ſurveying an Infant or a Savage. Shew us the Man completely formed and perfected by a liberal, a learned, and a religious Education.

Good-nature as you do in Senſe. Equally, we own in both: let us weigh this honeſtly. You are fixed here in a World in which theſe Infants have juſt got footing. They walk as you are pleaſed to direct them. They depend upon your Experience, and ſuch as yours; and you are in Truſt (as each Generation is for the ſucceeding one) for their Virtue, and for their Happineſs. You know (if you have Thought enough to know any thing,) that in this Wilderneſs, through which we are paſſing, there is but one ſure Road to the Point at which they aim: it is impoſſible to ſay how many there are in which they may be entangled and loſt. Will you then give them a plain Direction, and repeat it often? or will you leave them, by fatal Experience, to find that they have been miſerably miſtaken? — Or,

They are embarked in a long Voyage, upon a boiſterous Sea, will you ſupply them with your Compaſs, or leave them to the uncertain Guidance of Moon and Stars? Is not your Philoſophy Madneſs, and your Tenderneſs Inhumanity?

It is no eaſy Matter for the beſt of Parents, with all the Bias they can throw in by Inſtruction, Example, and Habit, on the Side of Virtue, to bring their Children exactly to the Mark. How much leſs then is to be expected from thoſe who have no Parents, or

poor

poor and perhaps vicious Ones? It is bad enough to be without a Guide! to have a wicked One is ſtill worſe: and what a Seminary for Youth is the World, where the Contagion of Wickedneſs inſinuates itſelf at every Senſe, before they are capable of diſtinguiſhing between Good and Evil. Hence ariſes a peculiar Propriety for erecting any School of Virtue; where Tares ſpring up ſo faſt, it requires a double Share of Attention to cultivate the better Seed.

We talk of a Chriſtian Country; but in what Vices do we fall ſhort of any idolatrous Nation? Chriſtianity is to the MORAL World what the Sun is to the NATURAL. The Sun, we ſee, may ſhine with all its Luſtre, and yet there are Places of the Earth ſo unfortunately ſituated, that no Ray of Light can ever reach them. "And if the Light which is in us be Darkneſs, how great is that Darkneſs!" — Upon the Whole,

It is an indiſputable Fact, that Men muſt learn; and they who do not learn betimes will learn with far more Difficulty, when advanced in Years. The Soil ſtiffens and hardens by continuing untilled. The Ground muſt be broken up, and good Seed be ſown, by him who expects to ſee Vallies covered with Corn at the Time of Harveſt. Weeds and Thiſtles only will be the ſpontaneous and unhappy Produce. If Children are not early conducted into the Paths of Truth and Virtue, they will be found, at a maturer Age, in thoſe of Error and Vice. We cannot, I am afraid, prevail upon (under)

Good-nature as you do in Senſe. Equally, we own, in both: let us weigh this honeſtly. You are fixed here in a World in which theſe Infants have juſt got footing. They walk as you are pleaſed to direct them. They depend upon your Experience, and ſuch as yours; and you are in Truſt (as each Generation is for the ſucceeding one) for their Virtue, and for their Happineſs. You know (if you have Thought enough to know any thing,) that in this Wilderneſs, through which we are paſſing, there is but one ſure Road to the Point at which they aim: it is impoſſible to ſay how many there are in which they may be entangled and loſt. Will you then give them a plain Direction, and repeat it often? or will you leave them, by fatal Experience, to find that they have been miſerably miſtaken? — Or,

They are embarked in a long Voyage, upon a boiſterous Sea, will you ſupply them with your Compaſs, or leave them to the uncertain Guidance of Moon and Stars? Is not your Philoſophy Madneſs, and your Tenderneſs Inhumanity?

It is no eaſy Matter for the beſt of Parents, with all the Bias they can throw in by Inſtruction, Example, and Habit, on the Side of Virtue, to bring their Children exactly to the Mark. How much leſs then is to be expected from thoſe who have no Parents, or

poor

poor and perhaps vicious Ones? It is bad enough to be without a Guide! to have a wicked One is ſtill worſe: and what a Seminary for Youth is the World, where the Contagion of Wickedneſs inſinuates itſelf at every Senſe, before they are capable of diſtinguiſhing on the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, to ſtand-neuter during the Experiment; an Experiment which whoever ſhall make once, without pretending to the Spirit of Prophecy, we may venture to predict, will find no Encouragement to make it again. — The Truth is, we muſt teach Children the beſt we can, while they are Young, leaving them to alter and correct afterwards if they ſhall ſee Occaſion. The Nature of the thing admits of no other Method conſiſtent with the Dictates of Reaſon and common Senſe. — But,

As, after all our beſt, &c. (under)

As, after all our beſt Endeavours herein, we cannot hope to ſee them blameleſs, the Part of good Education further conſiſts in wiſe and early Reſtraints from That which is evil, by proper and ſeaſonable Reproof, (*) and, if need be, by wholeſome Correction.

The

(*) *Homo haud per-raro latantes Virtutes allicit.*

See Note (*), Page 323.

Praiſe being the Reward of good Deeds, and Diſpraiſe the Puniſhment of bad, they ought not to be confounded in the Application.

The first of these is always to be prefered, if it will answer

Many religious and careful Parents are guilty of two great Miscarriages in this Part of Education.

First, Of too great Rigour and Severity; which, especially with some Sorts of Tempers, hath very ill Success.

The first Experiment that should be made upon Children, should be to allure them to their Duty, and by reasonable Inducements to gain them to the Love of Goodness, by Praise and Reward, and sometimes by Shame and Disgrace; and if this will do, there will be no Occasion to proceed to Severity; especially not to great Severities, which are very unsuitable to human Nature.

A Mixture of prudent and seasonable Reproof or Correction, when there is Occasion for it, may do very well; but Whips and Scourges are not "the Cords of a Man;" Human Nature may be driven by them, but it must be led by sweeter and gentler Methods.

Besides, frequent Corrections make Punishments to lose their Awe and Force, and are apt to spoil the Disposition of Children, and to harden them against Shame; and after a while they will despise Correction, when they find they can endure it. Indeed,

Great Severities do often work a quite contrary Effect to that which was intended, and make them hate Instruction for the Sake of the Cruelty that was used in forcing it upon them.

I the rather insist on this, because no Instances of Miscarriage have been observed more notorious, than in the Children of overstrict and severe Parents; of which no other Account can more rationally be given, than that Nature thus overcharged recoils the more terribly when once let loose. The vicious Dispositions of Children, restrained merely by Severity, do break forth strangely as soon as they get free from Discipline.

Another Miscarriage in this Matter is, when Reproof and Correction are accompanied and managed with Passion. This is to betray

anſwer the End; if not, it is a cruel Indulgence to forego the latter, and not to ſnatch them away from Evil, though with Smart and Violence; tho' even here, we ſhould be cautious that we do nothing raſhly, though ſeriouſly and in earneſt to diſcountenance in them the firſt Beginnings of Sin, that they may not be finally hardened thereby. (*) But, After

tray one Fault, and perhaps a greatery in the Puniſhment of another. Beſides, This makes Reproof and Correction to look like Revenge and Hatred, which uſually does not perſuade and reform, but provoke and exaſperate.

A Father is, as it were, a Prince and a Judge in his Family: there he gives Laws, and inflicts Cenſures and Puniſhments upon Offenders; which ſhould, therefore, always be adminiſtered with Juſtice and Judgment, Prudence and Diſcretion. See Note (‡), Vol. viii. Page 136.

Prohibenda eſt ira maxime in puniendo; nunquam enim Iratus, qui aſſerit ad Penam, Mediocritatem tenebit, quæ eſt inter nimium et parum. — Where Puniſhment is neceſſary, let it be moderate; not in Anger, leſt we tranſgreſs ourſelves. He that paſſeth Sentence haſtily, looks as if he did it willingly, and then there is Injuſtice in the Excels.

Flectitur Obſequio curvatus ab Arbore Ramus;
Frangas, & Vires experiare tuas.
Peregit tranquilla Poteſtas quod violenta nequit.
Eſt Modus in Rebus, ſunt certi denique Fines;
Quos ultrà, citràque nequit conſiſtere rectum.

(*) Solomon tells us that "the Rod and Reproof giveth Wiſdom;" and tho both theſe do ſuppoſe a Fault that is paſt, yet the great End of them is to prevent the like for the future, and to be an Admonition to them for the Time to come. And therefore, whatever ſhall

After all these Precautions, there is yet one Thing by probably be effectual for future Caution and Amendment, ought to be sufficient in this Kind; because the End is always to give Measure to the Means.

Where a mild and gentle Rebuke will be sufficient, there Reproof may stop without further proceeding; or, when That will not do, if a sharp Word and a severe Admonition will be effectual, the Rod may be spared: provided always, that our Lenity give no Encouragement to Sin, and be so managed that Children may perceive that we are in good earnest, and will certainly punish if they do not reform; and provided likewise, that our Lenity bear a due Proportion to the Nature and Quality of the Fault.

We must not use Mildness in the Case of a wilful and heinous Sin; especially if it be exemplary and of public Concern. To rebuke gently upon such an Occasion, is rather to countenance the Fault, and seems to argue that we are not sensible enough of the Enormity of it, and that we have not a due Dislike and Detestation of it.

Indeed, Most Children are of That Temper that Correction must be sometimes used, and a fond Indulgence in this Case is many Times their utter Ruin; and in Truth, is not Love but Hatred; so the Wise Man tells us: "He that spareth the Rod, hateth his Son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes." "Chasten thy Son while there is Hope, and let not thy Soul spare because of his Crying." And again, "Foolishness is bound up in the Heart of a Child, and the Rod of Correction shall drive it far from him." "Withhold not Correction from the Child, for if thou beatest him with a Rod he shall not die: thou shalt beat him with the Rod, and shalt deliver his Soul from Hell." Again, "The Rod and Reproof giveth Wisdom, but a Child left to himself will be wilful, and bringeth his Mother to Shame." He mentions the Mother emphatically, because she many Times is most faulty in this fond Indulgence; and therefore the Shame and Grief of it justly falls upon her.

So

by which all the foregoing are but too frequently deſtroyed, and that is, by ill Example. Whatever wholeſome Advice we give, or however ſevere to their Faults; yet, "all theſe things will profit them nothing," if we ourſelves, "who judge them, do the ſame."

Theſe are They that deſtroy the Counſels of the Vile, and ſet at nought all the Rebukes of the Wicked.

There are ſome whoſe Advice is good, but their Conduct ill; whoſe Deeds are Incongruities, whilſt their Words are Apothegms (ruling Speeches, ſparkling with Brightneſs of Thought, and weighty with Solidity

So that Correction is of great Uſe, and often neceſſary, and Parents that forbear it, are not only cruel to their Children, but to themſelves; for God many Times puniſhes thoſe Parents very ſeverely who have neglected this neceſſary Peice of Diſcipline. There is ſcarcely to be found in the whole Scriptures a more terrible temporal Threatning than That concerning Eli and his Houſe, for his fond Indulgence herein. See Page 143. — Indeed,

God very often corrects and remarkably puniſhes fond Parents by thoſe very Children who have wanted due Reproof and Correction; of which the Scripture gives us a remarkable Inſtance in Adonijah, upon the Mention of whoſe Rebellion againſt David his Father, the Text particularly takes notice of his Father's extreme Fondneſs of him, as both the procuring and meritorious Cauſe of it; "For his Father had not diſpleaſed him at any Time in ſaying, Why haſt thou done ſo?" — and on the contrary, the wiſe Son of Sirach tells us, that "he that chaſteneth his Son ſhall have Joy of him."

Serm. CCCLII.

Solidity of Senſe.) But it is not worth the Name of Wiſdom which can be heard only, and not ſeen. Good Diſcourſe is but the Reflection or Shadow of Wiſdom; the pure and ſolid Subſtance is good Actions.

If ever therefore we would have our Children good, and our Inſtructions profit them, we muſt be good ourſelves, and neither ſay (*) nor do before them, what we ourſelves would be unwilling to hear from them, or have them practice.

To keep the Paſſions of Others ſubmiſſive, there is a Neceſſity of triumphing over our own: — to oblige them to be virtuous, we muſt ſet the Example, and ourſelves be the Model. There is not a better Leſſon than That which a Superior makes it his Study to practiſe, and by ſo doing recommends it to Others. (‡)

Words

(*) *Aurea permanans ſervavit pœna Lagena*, is a good Caution to Parents and others, not to uſe too much Freedom in Diſcourſe before Children, for that their Sense of Hearing is not only ſo quick or quicker than that of their Elders, but alſo becauſe they have Tongues as fluent; and their Inpocence often divulges, what their Elders would have kept ſecret; *Maxima igitur debetur Puero Reverentia. A Verborum Turpitudine, præſens Filio, ſic tempera, quaſi veſtalibus Virginibus Arbitris locutus eſſes.*

Nil Dictu fœdum, Viſuque hæc Limina tangat,
Intrà quæ Puer eſt. ——— ———

The greateſt Reverence is due to Children., *Infans enim turpe aliquid auſurum Parentem videns, olim imitetur.*

(‡) Example draws where Precept fails.

Words without Practice are but Counſels without Effect: When we do as we ſay, it is THEN a Confirmation of the Rule; but when our Lives & Doctrines do not agree, it looks as if the Leſſon we taught, was either too hard for us, or that the Advice was not worth following. (*) We ſhould, therefore, be particularly heedful to mend our own Ways; that thoſe under us may be led to walk more uprightly. (‡)

Thus

(*) We do not want Precepts ſo much as Patterns, and Example is the ſofteſt, and leaſt inviduous Way of commanding. The Precepts and Admonitions of a very good Man have in them a very great Power of Perſuaſion, and are apt to move ſtrongly, and to inflame others to "go, and do likewiſe." But, the good Inſtructions of a bad Man are languid and faint; they give no Heart or Encouragement to follow That Counſel, which they ſee, He that gives it, does not think fit to take it himſelf.

Ut Corpus ſine Animâ nullas exhibit Vires, ſed mortuum ſit, et immotum; ſic Verba movent Præcepta, niſi vivida addas Factorum Exempla. Quæ Verbis docas, Exemplis oſtende.

(‡) It is a great Happineſs to have virtuous Parents, Relations, Tutors and Domeſticks; for it is from them we take up our Principles. We are born naked, both as to Mind and Body, and put on any Habit indifferently which is firſt offered us.

Magni refert quibuſcum vixeris,
Sic Pater, ſic Filius, } *&c.* } Theſe not only intimate the
Idem ſemper agit idem,

Force of Nature, but of Example alſo; and likewiſe the Strength of Imagination and Practice in the latter, as the violent Bent of Inclination in the former.

Thus paving the Way to their Conduct, let us be careful that none about them put a Stone of Stumbling, or Rock of Offence in their Way; but, let us remove every Occaſion of Evil from before them; thus will they ſee no Errors, nor hear any Wickedneſs; but, being "trained up in the Way wherein they ſhould go, they will have no Temptations to depart from it."

Poſſibly, it may here be objected, that the refined Education, which is capable of theſe Advantages, is calculated but for one Claſs of People, the Rich alone. But, it is hoped, no ſuch Conſtruction will be made; Every One is to conſult his Fortune and Circumſtance, and act according to the Limits of it. If ſome through the Narrowneſs of their Eſtates, are diſabled from making the Advantages they otherwiſe might; they have diſcharged their Duty, in beſtowing on their Children the beſt Education that their Abilities will permit.

* It is true, Children, tho not always, are generally like their Parents in their Minds, as in their Bodies — But the Point of Inſtruction in this, is chiefly directed at their Examples; for ſuch as the Parents are, as to Vice or Virtue, ſuch are, commonly, the Children. The ill Examples of a vicious Father almoſt univerſally tend to the corrupting a Son; when the good Precepts and Examples of a virtuous Father, go a great Way to the forming a virtuous One.

Mali Corvi, malum Ovum. Οὐδεὶς ἐκ ξυλίνης Ῥάδος ἅρπαξ ἀλώπηξ.

Bona bonis Prognata Parentibus.

permit. (*) Accordingly, no particular Method of pur-

suing

(*) However great and serviceable a Qualification Learning is, it is not of equal Service or Importance to every distinct Degree of Men. It is out of Character for a Gentleman of Birth and Fortune to know no more than he owes to the mere Light of Nature, the Information of Company, or family Conversation. But, the Want of Letters and politer Knowledge is a very excusable Defect in him, who, after he is once gone from School, is never to have more to do with it as long as he lives. Can there be any thing more ridiculous than that a Father should waste his Money and Son's Time, in letting him to learn the Roman Language, when at the same Time he designs him a Trade only, wherein he, having no Use for the dead Language, fails not to forget that little which he brought from School, and which, most probably, he abhors, for the ill Usage it procured him? Could it be believed, unless we had every where Examples of it, that a Child should be forced to learn the Rudiments of a Language, which he is never to use in the Course of his Life he is designed to, and neglect all the while the Writing a good Hand, and casting Accounts, which are of great Advantage in all Conditions in Life, and to most Trades indispensibly necessary.

If a Man can give his Son a Fortune sufficient to keep him above the Assistance of a Trade and Employment to help out his Subsistence; if he have enough to make a Figure, and be independent in the World, let his Learning and Accomplishments be as universal as Schools and Academies can furnish him withal: But, if Providence has placed him in a lower Sphere, if he must toil and struggle thro the World for a Livelihood, the Classical Learning will not be the best Step to his Advancement: There are Attainments of a more humble Nature, such as will serve him most, and turn him best for Business, and are requisite for a Man of Trade and Commerce.

What is most proper for Boys to learn, is, what will be of most Use to them, and what they ought to do when they come to be Men.

Serm. CCCLII.

ſuing it, is here limited, and the Matter is ſpoken to only abſtractedly, with Reference to the Influence it has on the Mind, and as it may be the Road to lead Children to Virtue and Goodneſs.

It is, therefore, in every Parent's Power, of what Degree or Circumſtances ſoever, by Exhortion and rational Motives, to prepare the Breaſt of his Child for the Reception of what is juſt and right: to reprehend, or encourage him according to the Variety of Occaſions; to make his Memory the Storehouſe of Piety and good Principles, to make him affable and courteous in Diſcourſe and Behaviour, to keep him from Luxury, bridle his Paſſions, and reſtrain his Actions, to ſet Examples before him fit for his Imitation, and not corrupt his Conduct by Patterns of Licentiouſneſs, to accuſtom him to ſpeak the Truth; and to account it, as indeed it is, a Matter of Religion to do ſo.

Theſe are Points independant on Affluence or Straitneſs of Fortune, and wherein Parents will aſſiſt themſelves from their own Prudence, and Propenſity to Virtue, to the beſt of their Skill.

"Happy are the Parents, that are in ſuch a Caſe; yea, bleſſed are the Children who have ſuch for their Friends."

Seeing with what ſmall Succeſs we attempt to convince

vince old and hardened Sinners, (*) who "reſt ſecure in the ſtrong Holds of their Iniquity;" yea, and even after their "abominable Sins are found out," we turn our Weapons upon the more weak and unfortified; and, ſince we can ſo hardly reform Men, let us take care to inſtruct our Children, and "train them up in the Way they ſhould go," "in the Fear and Nurture of the Lord;" leſt they alſo, with others, ſhould hereafter be irreclaimable.

To further and encourage this Work, I ſhall propoſe the following Particulars.

Firſt, Let us conſider that good Education is the very beſt Inheritance that we can leave our Children.

It is a wiſe Saying of Solomon, that "Wiſdom is good with an Inheritance;" but ſurely an Inheritance, without Wiſdom and Virtue to manage it, is a very pernicious thing. And yet, how many Parents are there who omit no Care, Pain, or Induſtry to leave their Children great and rich in this World; (‡) but yet, uſe no Means to form their Minds and Manners for a right Uſe and Enjoyment of it, without which it had better that they had never had it. All other things are but human and uncertain, and of ſmall Value, ſuch as will ſcarce recompenſe the Induſtry required to the getting of them. We

(*) Sermon 349. (‡) See Page 293.

We all may desire to be well descended; but it is of our Ancestor's Goods, and not our own. We may raise our Children to Honour, and provide for them, and by Kindness and Obligation procure them many Friends; but in the Changes and Revolutions of the World, their Honours may slip from under them; and their "Riches may take to themselves Wings and fly away;"—and when these are gone, and they come to be nipped with the Frost of Adversity, their Friends will fall off like leaves in Autumn. "This is a sore Evil, which yet I have seen under the Sun;" Glory is a thing deserving Respect, but unstable; Beauty is a Blessing, but of a short Continuance; Health a precious Enjoyment, but easily impaired; Strength, a Quality of Desire and Service, but apt to be the Prey of Diseases and Old-age: but the inherent Possessions of Virtue and sound Principles, and those noble Qualifications of the Mind, which are treasured there, by a just Institution and habitual Practice, are not to be molested by Fortune, decayed by Time, nor taken away by the Tyranny of Accidents; but adorn in Prosperity, and assist in Adversity. (*) If

(*) Learning alone, of all things in our Possession, is immortal and divine. It is against all Assults of Fortune impregnable; not to be taken away by false Accusation, or impaired by Sickness, or enfeebled by Old-age. Time, which decays all other things, increaseth Knowledge in us in our decaying Years. We may be plun-

If the good Education of our Children, therefore, have made them wiſe and virtuous, we have then provided an Inheritance for them, which is out of the Reach of Fortune, and cannot be taken from them; we have provided for them "Bags which wax not old, a Treaſure which faileth not," but will increaſe with Age, and make their temporal Accommodations ſhine with the greater Luſtre. (*) Again, By

plundered of our Wealth, defrauded of our Lands, and our Books may become the Prey of ſome fatal Accident. But That Chance, which robs us of our Library, cannot take from the Advantages we have reaped by our prior Reſort to it. In a Word,

The Man of Taſte and Learning creates, as it were, a little World of his own, in which he exerciſes his Faculties, and feels Satisfaction from things, the Exiſtence of which is ſcarcely known to vulgar Minds. Learning is our Companion and Aſſiſtant in every Age, Place and Circumſtance.

Literarum Studia Adoleſcentiam alunt, Senectutem oblectant, ſecundas Res ornant, adverſas Præſugium ac Solatium præbent; delectant Domi, non impediunt Foris, pernoctant nobiſcum, peregrinantur, ruſticantur, nec gravant Circumferentem. Ut Medicinæ Corporis Languores et Dolores mederentur, ita Animi Morbis Doctrinæ Præcepta certiſſima obſtant, et faciunt ut adverſam Fortunæ Mutationem æquo Animo ferremus.

Inſtruction and good Education is a double Portion.

Monuments of Learning are moſt durable.

See Note (*), Page 306.

(*) A Life of Letters is a Life of comparative Innocence, and ſecure from many Immoralities and Improprieties, as

1ſt. From Idleneſs—Learning requires ſo much Thought, Application, and Diligence, that it is hardly poſſible for a lazy Perſon,

By a careful and religious Education of our Children,

to make any Proficiency; One who is very superficial may indeed be idle; but all who attain to any Eminence in any Art or Science must have bestowed so much Pains that they are not chargeable with Indolence.

2dly, From Slander. Idle and ignorant Persons are perhaps most given to Calumny, but Men of Reading are under no Temptation to slander their Neighbours for the Want of Knowledge, or the Want of better Employment. Most of the Topics of Slander are too little and too low for a Man of solid Wisdom, and his Thoughts are usually employed on much greater Subjects than Envy, Jealousy, and Malevolence.

3dly, From bad Company. Ignorance, and Want of Employment are the frequent Causes of falling into improper Company; but Men of Learning have That Sense which make them to know what is evil Company, and as they love Books they can never want Employment; evil Men in general know that it is to no Purpose to attempt to seduce the Learned, and the Learned are not inclined to go amongst them.

4thly, From Dissipation. Those who are most given to Vice and Vanity, are in general those who know of no superior Pleasures; but true Learning points out many more important Pursuits, and he who finds his refined Pleasures in a Library, will not often be seen in the Tavern, or at the gaming Table; he is pleased in getting Ideas, and extending his Knowledge, and envies not the wretched Enjoyments of the Vain and the Intemperate.

Since then, the Pursuit of Letters is attended with so many Circumstances peculiarly favourable to Innocence and Morality, and consequently of Enjoyments the most pure and permanent, those who are fixed in so desirable a Life as a Life of Learning ought to be grateful to Providence for their fortunate Lot, and in Return to devote their Leisure, their Abilities, and their various Acquirements, to the Glory of God and the Benefit of Mankind.

dren, we provide for our own Comfort and Happineſs. However they happen to prove, we ſhall have the Comfort of a good Conſcience, and of having done our Duty: — If they be good, they will be Matter of Comfort and great Joy to us. — "A wiſe Son (ſaith Solomon) maketh a glad Father." It is a great Satisfaction to ſee the Work of our Hands to proſper. The Son of Sirach (among ſeveral things for which he reckons a Man happy) mentions this in the firſt Place, "He hath Joy of his Children." On the contrary,

In wicked Children the Honour of a Family fails, their Name withers, and in the next Generation it will be clean blotted out: Whereas, a hopeful Poſterity is a Proſpect of a Kind of Eternity. We cannot leave a better and more laſting Monument of ourſelves, than in wiſe and virtuous Children, the very Semblances of Ourſelves. — Yea,

By the good Education of our Children we provide for ourſelves ſome of the beſt Comforts both for this World, and a better.

For this World; and that too, at ſuch a Time when we ſhall ſtand moſt in need of Comfort, in Sickneſs and Old-age. They will THEN be the Light of our Eyes, and the Cordial of our fainting Spirits; and will recompenſe all our former Care of them, by their then Care of us; and when we are decaying, we ſhall

have the Pleaſure to ſee our Youth, as it were, renewed, and ourſelves floriſhing again in our Children. "Tho he die (ſaith the Son of Sirach) yet he is, as if he were not dead, for he hath left One behind him, that is like himſelf; while he lived, he ſaw and rejoiced in him; and when he died he was not ſorrowful."

On the Contrary, "A fooliſh Son is a Heavineſs to his Mother" – is a Burden to our Age, and "brings down our gray Hairs with Sorrow to the Grave."

But further, — Good Children will likewiſe be an unſpeakable Comfort to us in the other World. When we come to appear before God at the Day of Judgment, to be able to ſay to him: "Lo! here am I, and the Children which thou gaveſt me," How will This comfort our Hearts, and make us lift up our Heads with Joy in That Day?

Add to this, the Benefit of it to Society in general, whoſe Welfare muſt be preſerved and promoted by the Well-being of its Individuals in particular.

What need I more! — The Soil is our own, let it not want Cultivation; the Seed which we ſow, that alſo ſhall we reap.

If ever Times be better, and Men's Manners regulated, Parents muſt be the Reformers, in whoſe Power it is to make the next Age, whatever juſt Complaints there are againſt this, even juſt as they will. (*)

(*) See Page 197.

But,

"But, What ſmall Proſpect have we of This, whilſt there are ſo many Inſtances of croſs Dealings before us! Of Men, who are ſo far from training up their Children to good, by Inſtruction, Reproof, and Example, that the Reverſe is almoſt their general Practice; Such are the Poor, who indulge their Children in every vile Art – the Rich, in Pride and Covetouſneſs – the Corrupt, to Lewdneſs and Immorality; the Atheiſtical, to Profaneneſs – and every wicked Parent delighting to ſee their Children reſemble them in their Vices, as in their Features; and, in the Pſalmiſt's Phraſe, endeavouring to make them ſuch as they are themſelves;" (*) and neither by Inſtruction, nor Example, nor Reſtraint from Evil, endeavour their Amendment; – Theſe are They that "know not how to give good Gifts unto their Children;" but inſtead of a Fiſh, give them a Serpent; and inſtead of an Egg, give them a Scorpion, as our Saviour expreſſeth it; thereby treaſuring up for their Children and themſelves, "Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God." But,

The Miſchief ends not here, it extends itſelf to the Publick, and to Poſterity.

If we neglect the good Education of our Children, they

(*) *Simile ſimili gaudet.* Serm. CCCLII.

they will, in all Probability, prove bad Men; and theſe will neglect their Children: and ſo the Foundation of an endleſs Miſchief is laid; and our Poſterity may continue ſo forever, and be, at once, the Burthen of the Earth, the Nuiſance of Society, and the Poiſon and Peſt of future Generations. But,

What Recompence can we make them for theſe things, or even to ourſelves, who muſt, in the End, with them, without ſincere Repentance and Amendment, be miſerably deſtroyed forever?

To ſuch, therefore, juſtly belongs that Reprimand, (however ſevere) which St. Paul gave to Elemas, the Sorcerer, "O full of all Subtilty, and all Miſchief, "thou Child of the Devil, thou Enemy of all Right-"eouſneſs, wilt thou not ceaſe to pervert the right Way "of the Lord?" From which, if Parents will not ceaſe, they will have no leſs Reaſon to fear "the Hand of God upon them" in ſome as heavy a Judgment.

What will they be able to ſay, when they ſhall be challenged in the Matters of Inſtruction, Example, and Reſtraint from Sin? — How will they tremble, when God ſhall ariſe terribly in Judgment, and ſay to them, "Behold the Children and the Families which I have given you, They were ignorant, and you inſtructed them not; they made themſelves vile, and you reſtrained them not: Be ye, therefore, Partakers with them in Miſery." Yea, And

And not only God, but even our Children themſelves will alſo accuſe us, and ſay, "Lo! Theſe are the Men that we accounted our Friends! whoſe Actions we had in Honour, and highly eſteemed them! but how are they greatly fallen, ſtricken of God, ſmitten, and afflicted!" — "Woe is me, that I was conſtrained to dwell with Meſech, and to have my Habitation among the Tents of Kedar, among them that were long Enemies unto Peace" — "Curſed be the Man that begat me, and the Paps that gave me Suck."

Will it not make the Ears of the hardieſt of us to tingle, and tremble throughout, when hereafter, in Miſery, we ſhall "lift up our Heads, being in Torment," and ſhall hear our Children, the Imitators of our Vices, whom we ought to have inſtructed better, thus ſeverely to rebuke us, in that great and terrible Day of the Lord?

I am unable to make a juſt Repreſentation of it; and therefore, how much better had it been for them, as well as for us, had they never been born?

Let me, then, intreat all that are in Charge over the riſing Generation, whether they be Parents or Maſters, that they be faithful and diligent in the Diſcharge of the Duty intruſted to them, as they tender the Good of Souls, the Welfare of the Public, and the Honour and Happineſs of themſelves and their Poſterity. For,

Without this, faithful Community muſt ceaſe: and

with it, all things will flouriſh and abound. Hereby we ſhall have done our Duty; and if, after all, they fail, we ſhall have ſaved our own Souls, and ſhall not have to anſwer for any of their Sins. But, If we ſucceed, as in all Probability we ſhall with due Care, what Ornament will they be to us! what Joy and Rejoicing! and to themſelves, an everlaſting Reward.

To Conclude: "Conſider, thou who art a Parent, the Importance of thy Truſt; the Being thou haſt produced it is thy Duty to ſupport.

"Upon thee alſo it dependeth, whether the Child of thy Boſom ſhall be a Bleſſing or a Curſe to thyſelf, an uſeful, or a worthleſs Member to the Community.

"Prepare him early with Inſtruction, and ſeaſon his Mind with the Maxims of Truth.

"Watch the Bent of his Inclination, ſet him right in his Youth, and let no evil Habit gain Strength with his Years. Teach him Obedience, and he ſhall bleſs thee; teach him Modeſty, and he ſhall not be aſhamed; teach him Gratitude, and he ſhall receive Benefits; teach him Charity, and he ſhall gain Love; teach him Temperance, and he ſhall have Wealth; teach him Prudence, and Fortune ſhall attend him; teach him Juſtice, and he ſhall be honoured by the World; teach him Sincerity, and his own Heart ſhall not reproach him; teach him Diligence, and his Wealth ſhall increaſe;

increaſe; teach him Benevolence, and his Mind ſhall be exalted; teach him Science, and his Life ſhall be uſeful; teach him Religion, and his Death ſhall be happy.

"He ſhall riſe like a Cedar on the Mountains; his Head ſhall be ſeen above the Trees of the Foreſt."

For, "Thus it is in the Habitations of the Juſt, and their Generations ſhall continue forever." (*)

(*) See the Note, Vol. xv, Page 179. On the great Duty of training up poor Children; the Obligation lie, and Benefits of it.

Sermon

SERMON CCCLIII.

Inconſtancy,

Caprice, Unſteadineſs, Fickleneſs, &c.

Gen. xlix. 4. "Unſtable as Water, thou ſhalt not "excel."

Theſe are Part of the dying Patriarch Jacob's Words, when he bleſſed the Twelve, "leaning upon the Top of his Staff."

Of the Eldeſt of theſe, (Reuben) the Character he gives, is contained in the Words before us; of which there are ſeveral very different Interpretations.

I ſhall not trouble you with them, but take That which they moſt naturally bear; according to which, Jacob ſeems to repreſent Reuben as of a fickle, uncertain and irreſolute Temper; not utterly void of all Propenſions to Goodneſs, but incapable of acting up to them; not without honeſt and virtuous Reſolutions, but unable firmly to keep and practiſe them.

This being his Caſe, he pronounces upon him, that "he ſhall not excel:" (i.e) that he ſhall never arrive to any Degree of Perfection in Virtue, nor ever command

a

a thorough Eſteem and Reſpect from good Men; that he ſhould never be able eminently to diſtinguiſh himſelf by the Exercife of thoſe good Qualities of Mind which procure Honour and Happineſs to Men in this World and the next. "Unſtable as Water, thou ſhalt not excel."

The Sentiment is, indeed, worthy of That Wiſdom and prophetic Knowledge which the eaſtern Sages were ſuppoſed to have been, in a particular Manner, favoured with, upon the Approach of Death.

From which, therefore, a natural Occaſion will be given us of diſcourſing on the ill Condition of That Man who, (like Reuben in the Text,) being "unſtable as Water," is diſtracted between two Courſes of Life, a good and a bad One: I ſhall, therefore,

Firſt, Speak to this State in general: And then,

Secondly, Apply it; that we may fix a ſure Principle within us; that we may guide and govern ourſelves throughout, and be uniformly wiſe and holy.

The Condition of a Man who is thus divided between Virtue and Vice is certainly wretched and deplorable. — For, He is in the meaneſt State of Mind that human Nature is capable of: He looſes all the Advantages of this World, and moſt aſſuredly forfeits all Pretences to any in the next. — And,

Firſt, This uncertain Way of living proceeds from

a mean State of Mind, ſuch as is beneath the Dignity of human Nature.

Man was made to diſcern and embrace Truth: And for this Reaſon "is there a Spirit in him; and the Inſpiration of the Almighty hath given him Underſtanding." — He hath Faculties whereby to diſtinguiſh between Truth and Falſehood, between Right and Wrong; and may fix to himſelf ſure Principles of Action: When he does this, and adheres to it, he THEN anſwers the End of his Being. — But,

When he floats in Uncertainty, and is ſwayed different Ways, by different Motives, he THEN forfeits the great Prerogative, and the moſt diſtinguiſhing Advantage that belongs to the Reaſonable Nature.

The Scripture doth not allow to the Inconſtant and Fickle the Name of Men. They are ſaid to be "Children, toſſed to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine:" They are in the Weakneſs and Non-age of their Reaſon, which is not, as yet, improved and ripened into its due Strength and Maturity. (*)

The Perfection of Man is to be like God; for, "in his own Image created he him;" to be like God in all his Attributes, paticularly in the Glory of his Immutability, whereby He is, as the Scripture ſpeaks, "without

(*) *Inconſtantia eſt Vitium et Signum vacillantis Animi, et nondum ſubeuntis Vigorem ſuum.*

out Variableneſs, or Shadow of turning; the ſame Yeſterday, To-day, and For-ever." (*)

As to the Immutability of God, ſo far as it reſpects his Nature, we have indeed here no Room to imitate; God deſigned this Life for a changeable State, as to our Make and Frame; but, the laſt great and glorious Change will render us, even in our Natures, immortal, unalterable, and eternally the ſame, and happy. — But,

His moral Immutability; the Steadineſs of His Counſels, His Purpoſes, and Actions, we may, in ſome Meaſure, and therefore muſt imitate, as far as we are able, and act evenly and uniformly. (†) — Indeed, Unleſs

(*) *Non unum hodiè, aliud Cras; ſed ſemper idem. Mutare, vel timere ſperno.*

(†) See Vol. ii. Page 406, &c. The elegant Similies, given us by the Poet, of Conſtancy, particularly claim here a Recital.

Ille velut Rupes vaſtum quæ prodit in Æquor,
Obvia Ventorum furiis, expoſtaque Vento,
Vim cunctam atque Minas perfert, Cœlique, Mariſque,
Ipſa immota manet. ——— ———
Ac veluti annoſam valido cum Robore Quercum,
Alpini Boreæ, nunc hinc, nunc flatibus illinc
Eruere inter ſe certant: it Stridor, et altè
Conſternunt Terram concuſſo Stipite Frondes;
Ipſa hæret Scopulis, et quantùm Vertice ad Auras
Æthereas, tantùm Radice in Tartara tendit;
Haud ſecùs affiduis hinc atque illinc Vocibus Heros
Tunditur, et magnas preſentit Pectore Curas.

Serm. CCCLIII. Mens

Unleſs Reaſon gives us a Firmneſs and Conſtancy of acting, it is ſo far from being the Glory and Privilege, that it is really the Reproach and Diſgrace of our Natures, and makes us lower than even the Brute Creation; for, they always act regularly and conſonantly to themſelves, under the never-erring Guidance of Inſtinct; a blind, but ſure Principle: (*) Whilſt Man, with all his boaſted Titles and Privileges, wanders in continual Uncertainties, and contradicts himſelf throout all the various Scenes, both of thinking and acting. — But,

Secondly, As the Dignity of our Nature, is a Conſideration capable of touching but few, let us go on therefore to what is more plain and affecting.

And here, ſuch Unſettledneſs creates a Deal of Trouble and Diſturbance to the Man who is ſo unhappy as to be actuated with it.

This follows plainly from the former; for, whatever is

Mens immota manet. —— ——
Juſtum & tenacem Propoſiti Virum,
Non Civium Ardor prava jubentium, *Nec fulminantis magna Jovis Manus*
Non Vultus inſtantis Tyranni *Si fractus illabitur Orbis (nus,*
Mente quatit ſolidâ: neque Auſter, *Impavidum ferient Ruinæ;*
Mens intacta manet, ſuperat, rideique Deſuper.

Where the Foundation is weak, the Frame tottereth; and where the Root is not deep, the Tree falleth. See No. 262, of the Spectator.

(*) See No. 120, and 121, of the Spectator.

is natural, becoming, and worthy of us, is attended always with Eaſe and Delight to the Doer; whereas the contrary muſt be deſtructive of every right Principle, and create Pain and Uneaſineſs.

Certainly, a Mind always at odds with itſelf cannot but be very troubleſome to the Man that hath it, unleſs, together with the Power of keeping his Reſolutions, he hath loſt alſo that of reflecting afterwards on the Breach of them; which (and ſorry we are to ſay it) is but too frequently the Caſe. Men, by a conſtant Round of ſinning and repenting, at Length ſtupify every thing that is rational within them; (*) at beſt, their good Fits, like ſhort Intervals of Madneſs, will ſerve only to let them more into the Knowledge of their Diſeaſe, and render the Reflection of their Follies more acute, as being then ſenſible of their Miſeries. — But further,

The Temper before us is hurtful to us in Point of Intereſt, as well as Eaſe; rendering us unfit for all the Affairs and Buſineſs of Life; incapable of forming advantageous Deſigns with Confidence, or of proſecuting them with Effect. "A double-minded Man is unſtable in all his Ways." (†) In

(*) *Crebrò impingere Lapſus Indicium eſt.*

(†) *Inter cætera Mala hæc quoque habet Stultitia, Semper incipit vivere.* There are thoſe in the World of ſo unſettled and reſtleſs a Temper, and ſuch Admirers of Novelty, that they can never be long

In Matters that relate to the common Conduct of Life, to the Progreſs of Art, and the Acquiſition of Knowledge, it is obvious, both from Reaſon and Experience, that a wavering Diſpoſition can never attain either to Excellence or to Happineſs. With Regard to Religion, the Concluſion is equally true. (*)

This is a natural Effect of that divided Mind we are now ſpeaking of. It was ſo with the revolting Jews in the Prophet's Time. "Their Heart is divided" (ſaith

pleaſed with one Way of Living; but before they are long ſettled into one Way of Buſineſs, dip into another; ſo that they are always buſily beginning to live; but by Reaſon of Fickleneſs and Impatience, never arrive at any ſettled Way of Living. Theſe can never make any Proficiency in Life, nor arrive at Eminence in any thing.

Some People will never learn any thing, for this Reaſon, becauſe they underſtand every thing too ſoon. It is the Fault of young Beginners to venture upon many things they do not underſtand, and ſo renounce them as ſoon as they come to know them.

The Wiſe continueth to live from his firſt Period; but the Fool is always beginning. That Plant never proſpers that is often removed.

(*) Conſtancy (which is cloſely connected with Fortitude) conſiſts chiefly in ſuch a ſteady Firmneſs of Mind as enables us to go thro with what we are engaged in, notwithſtanding all Manner of Obſtacles or Oppoſition, ſo that if it be but attainable.

It hath been owing to ſuch Firmneſs of Mind that Conqueſts have been made, Inventions completed, and Arts, Sciences, and all great Undertakings brought to Perfection. Indeed, without Conſtancy and Courage, nothing in Religion, Learning, or common Life, can be properly carried on and finiſhed.

(saith God) i.e. between Me and Baal; "therefore shall they be found faulty; and are as an empty Vine." Were the Heart once fixed to a Point, it would soon know what to purpose and prosecute; but having not steady certain Views, is must of Consequence be undetermined. What it desires at one Time, it despiseth at another; soon flies from what it before pursued; and again pursues what it so industriously avoided.

Thus "a double-minded Man" spends his whole Life, as it were, in doing and undoing, in sinning and repenting, till his last Summons comes, and then indeed he is determined. Death, or the near and certain Approach of it, fixes his Views entirely for God and Heaven, but it is under the Amazement and Horror of this Reflection, that he hath but a few Hours to do That in, which ought to have been the Business and Care of his whole Life, but which he could never before fully find in his Heart to make so. However variable and changing the Heart may be in Life, it will be fixed in Death; but THEN it may be too late.

But further, — Another Effect of a divided Heart is, that it can seldom in good Earnest fall-in with the Dictates of Conscience in the plainest Instances of Duty. Be the Duty ever so important, the Call of Providence ever so loud, the Voice of Conscience ever so strong, there is yet something within that draws him back, and

makes him dull, cold, and reluctant, where others are; and he himſelf ought to be, all Life, Spirit and Zeal. He drags heavily towards it, as if every Action that is ſacred to God was a Clog upon his Life and Liberty: and Religion, which was deſigned to ſet him free from the Captivity of Sin, was itſelf his greateſt Chain.

Thus it is at theſe Times, when the carnal Part of his Temper prevails, which is but too often. — Again,

This Unequalneſs of acting will draw upon a Man the Suſpicion of Hypocriſy and Diſſimulation. He who, in the Eye of the World, is ſometimes good, and ſometimes bad, as it happens, will be ſure to have Judgment paſſed upon him according to the worſt Appearance, and the other Parts of his Character eſteemed only as pure Artifice; his Credit will be blaſted, and his good Name taken away.

Intimacies and Friendſhips are the great Comforts and Supports of Life; and, of theſe, ſuch a Man will be always thought incapable. What Ground can his Levity give any One to build their Confidence upon? (*) What Encouragement is there to venture an Ac-

(*) *Ut Hyæna, ſicti Ichneumon, nunc Mas eſt, nunc Femina; ita quidem Inconſtantiâ ſuâ diſſimilis, ut nunc ſortita lequatur, nunc mollia; nunc Philoſophi ſint, nunc Nepotes, nunc Amici, nunc Inimici.*

Ut Cera, quovis Formâ aut Imagine figuratur; ita quidem ſæpe mutantes, ut ad Formam earum, quibuſcum verſantur, ſemper conver-

tuntur.

Acquaintance with the rash and unstable? What Reason to expect a mutual Consent and Agreement of Thoughts and Affections from a Mind so little at "Unity in itself?" — But,

Fourthly, These are slight Inconveniencies in Comparison of what follows. "The double-minded Man" is easily overcome "in the Hour of Temptation." (*) The faint Purposes of his Mind which he sometimes hath for God and Goodness, are no Guard upon him against a sudden Surprise. His good Impressions

tantur. Qui Moribus est inæqualibus, nec ulli certo Vitæ Instituto, in quo est aptus ad aliorum Consuetudinem.

Oh! World! thy slippery Turns! Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double Bosoms seem to wear one Heart,
Whose Hours, whose Bed, whose Meal and Exercise
Are still together; who twine (as 'twere) in Love
Inseparable; shall within this Hour,
On the Dissention of a Doit, break out
To bitterest Enmity. —— So fellest Foes,
Whose Passions, and whose Plots have broke their Sleep,
To take the One the Other, by some Chance,
Some Trick as futile, shall grow dear Friends,
And interjoin their Issues. ———

(*) Ut Conchilia crescente Luna augescunt, decrescente marcescunt; ita Studia, & Fortuna pendulæ; nunc magnus es, magnus Pusillus; nunc status, nunc supplex; utcunque Rhamnusia mutaverit faces.

Multaque submisit, multa minantia agit.
Ut Signum a Signo, sic a se discrepat ipse.
——— —— —— Nil fuit unquam
Tam dispar sibi. ——— Serm. CCCLIII.

preſſions are all loſt, and have left nothing behind them to be an Anchor and Stay to his Soul under a violent or unexpected Aſſault of the Tempter; ſo that he readily yields; which he hath no ſooner done, than he repents: and under the very next Temptation ſins again. — Now,

Such a Temper of Mind is utterly inconſiſtent with the Terms of Salvation, and the Hopes of eternal Happineſs; for, it is not an irregular Holineſs, entertained only according to the Ebbings and Flowings of uncertain Paſſion, but a conſtant and regular Principle alone, that will entitle us to it.

"If ye continue in my Word (ſaith our Saviour) THEN are ye my Diſciples indeed." — Again:

"If any Man draw back, my Soul ſhall have no Pleaſure in him." We muſt therefore ſurrender to God the Whole of our Service, and admit of no Allay in the Performance of our Duty, which he cannot be ſaid to do, who admits contrary Intereſts perpetually to ſtruggle within him, and, in his heartieſt Repentance, is not without ſome Proſpect of ſinning again. (*)

Let

(*) One very great Cauſe why Men that have often thought to reform their Lives, and reſolve againſt their evil Courſes, yet repent of their Repentance, their Reſolution becoming frail and fruitleſs, is, becauſe they do not uſe Mortification, to work their Averſion high and ſtrong againſt their Sins, and fix their Reſolution.

Our

Let no Man, therefore, flatter himſelf that Things are well with him, becauſe he is not abſolutely "given over to a reprobate Mind, to work Wickedneſs;" who, ſometimes, though ſeemingly "dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins," yet riſes again by Repentance; let no Man preſume upon this; for, it will by no Means ſerve him, there being no Promiſe in Scripture made to the Unſtable; but univerſal Sincerity is conſtantly required, and the Fullneſs of Reward is only with them.

But further: — As the State of a Man is thus already very dangerous with Reſpect to another World, ſo is it likely ſtill to grow worſe, till at laſt without Remedy. — For,

Every new Return to Sin, every ſingle Deſertion and

Our Repentance, in general, is but ſome tranſient Diſlike of our Sin, ſome faint and fruitleſs Wiſhes to do better. But,

It is no faint Reſiſtance that will make the Temptations of the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil give-way; we muſt offer a reſolute Violence to all our earthly Appetites, if we mean nobly to force our Way thro theſe almoſt inevitable Dangers.

It is not for nothing that the Scripture bids us "ſtrive, and fight, "and wreſtle, and run, and labour, and watch, and faſt, and pray, "and work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling."

There is nothing but Auſterities will mortify the Inclinations that oppoſe themſelves to the Spirit; "Theſe Kind go not out, but by Prayer and Faſting:" By denying the Deſire of our Appetites, we ſhall be able to calm and moderate our Affections to every thing below, and then Temptations will have neither Aid nor Avenue.

and Deviation from Virtue, naturally diſqualifies us more and more from a ſound Repentance, and weakens all the Motives leading to it.

Sin, by this Means, grows familiar to us, and we find fewer Horrors at Tranſgreſſion, and withall leſs Deſires of Repentance. — Beſides,

By theſe Viciſſitudes of ſinning and relapſing, our Reſolution at laſt is quite broken, and we ſit down every Time with leſs and leſs Hopes of the Mercy and Forgiveneſs of God, and conſequently of His Grace and Aſſiſtance.

Much more might be ſaid to ſet-forth the Danger of this State, and the Inconſiſtency of it with the Terms of Salvation, if this were not a Point already too plain to need any further Proof.

"There is, indeed, a more wretched Temper ſtill, than what we have deſcribed: [viz] a ſteady Diſpoſition to Sin. Where the Mind is fixed, but fixed to the wrong Way, ſo that it hath ſcarce any Variation towards the things of God and another World. Such a Man indeed is not "unſtable in all his Ways," but determined, reſolute, and unalterably bent and ſettled one Way, and That in the wrong. But as this is not what the Text leads us directly to conſider — I ſhall proceed as propoſed,

Secondly, To perſuade Men, by ſome ſerious Conſiderations,

ſiderations, to fix a ſure Principle of Virtue within them, that they may guide and govern themſelves throughout, and be uniformly wiſe and holy.

It is the Prophet's juſt Obſervation, that the "Wicked are like the troubled Sea, when it cannot reſt." The various and oppoſite Motives which ſucceſſively, and not ſeldom at the ſame Inſtant of Time, agitate a Mind deſtitute of Religion, naturally create Diſtraction in deliberating, Diffidence in reſolving, and Inconſtancy in acting. A Man, in ſuch a Situation, is always diſſatisfied, and therefore always uneaſy; and becauſe always uneaſy, ever unſettled. And accordingly he is continually changing his Meaſures, and (like "the double-minded Man) unſtable in all his Ways."

But, How different the Caſe of That Man, who has "the Law of God in his Heart," and hath formed to himſelf a Principle of Duty! – He has a plain Rule, and an honeſt Mind, to direct the Application of it. He firſt "ponders well the Path of his Goings, and then turneth not to the Right-hand, or to the left." He firſt takes due Care to inform his Judgment aright, and then purſues what That dictates, without Variation. (*) He is ſteady without Obſtinacy, and proceeds with Uniformity of Conduct, becauſe "with Singleneſs of Heart, fearing God."

If,

(*) *Sibi conſtat.*

If, therefore, we would, to any good Purpoſe, engage herein, we muſt be ſure that our Faith is right, and that we are ſound there; for, Want of Stability is generally the Cauſe of all the Uneaſineſs and Diſorder that is ſeen in the Lives and Practices of Men.

A ſudden Heat of Devotion, or the Fear of what may become of a Man in the other World, will carry him ſometimes into mighty Reſolutions of quitting Sin, and living well for the future. — But,

Theſe wear off quickly, and come to nothing, becauſe they aroſe only from preſent Paſſion, and were not built on any good Foundation, on any ſtrong and full Conviction of the Mind: They are "the Seed which fell upon ſtony Places, where they had not much Earth; and forthwith they ſprung up becauſe they had no Deepneſs of Earth; but when the Sun was up (when any hot Temptation preſented itſelf afreſh) they were ſcorched, and becauſe they had no Root, they withered away." — "In Time of Temptation they fell away."

It concerns us, therefore, to be rooted and well grounded in Faith; for, hereby we ſhall moſt aſſuredly go on to virtuous Actions, and our Life will be all Harmony to it. And,

To confirm us herein, let us aſk ourſelves the following Queſtions: — What is the Reaſon that the Promiſe of eternal Life, ſo immenſe in itſelf, ſhould ſo little influence

fluence Men, and make their Endeavours ſo inconſtant, faint, and languid after it? Are any temporal Things ſo valuable as the Glories of Heaven, or any Evils here ſo dreadful as the Miſeries of Hell? This none can pretend; becauſe the Good or Evil of this Life is of ſhort Continuance, but That of the next is durable and eternal. Or, why are Chriſtians ſo cold and indifferent about the momentous Concerns of another Life, as if it was of no Importance to them? This can be no otherwiſe accounted for, but that Men do not heartily believe what they profeſs, or not duly conſider it.

Moſt Men, whatever they profeſs or pretend, or however they may deny it, are not ſincerely perſuaded of the Certainty of a future State; their Underſtandings not being rationally convinced of this Truth, the Belief of it is not firmly rooted in their Minds. — Indeed, Was God to gratify the Expectation of ſome Men, and indulge us with the Sight of theſe future Glories and Miſeries which are revealed in the Goſpel, this might perhaps prevail to convince and reform Mankind. Would he give us a View, (though but ſhort and tranſient) of that bleſſed Place where he ever lives, to behold for a few Moments the perfect Happineſs of thoſe bleſſed Souls who are admitted into his beatific Preſence; or would he open the Gates of Hell, and

permit us to look into that horrid Receptacle of wicked Spirits, to be Eye and Ear-witneſſes of their ſad Torments, Deſpair, and Miſery; ſuch a Sight perhaps might poſſibly reform and make us to be what God requires. But God's Ways are not like our Ways, nor his Thoughts like our Thoughts. He governs us in a Method ſuitable to our Rational Natures, and gives us ſuch Aſſurances of another Life, as are abundantly ſufficient to ſatisfy and convince Men, but yet ſo as that it may be reſiſted by thoſe who reſolve not to believe it. For if the Rewards of Religion had been preſent to our Senſes, there could have been no Trial of Men, no Difference between the Wiſe and Conſiderate, and the fooliſhly Wicked.

God will not force a Faith on us, but requires it as a Matter of Choice, an Inſtance of our Virtue. There is no Faith in believing what we ſee; ſuch believe not God, but their own Eyes. But bleſſed are they who have not ſeen, and yet believe. The things unſeen which God hath revealed, ought to have the ſame Effect, as if the other World was viſible to us. And as the Principles of Religion, which concern another Life, are not things to be ſeen, we can only be aſſured of them by proper Arguments and Teſtimonies, about which we muſt uſe our Reaſon to judge the Force of them, before we can be really convinced by them.

Nor

Nor is this difficult: it only requires such serious Attention of Mind, to examine with Care and Diligence the Evidences of a future State, as Men commonly use in other Affairs, when they would find out the Truth. But the Generality of professed Christians are so far from being convinced of the Truth of Religion by rational Arguments, that very few of them ever inquire into the Reasons of their Belief. Their Faith is solely owing to Education, and the Examples of others, or embraced without any Consideration of the Grounds and Reasons of it. And then no Wonder, if a Faith thus received without any rational Conviction, and so weakly founded, should have but little Force or Power on Men's Minds. This is not the Faith which our Saviour requires, or that God will accept from those who are capable of acquiring a better.

One great Reason, therefore, of the Inefficacy of Men's Faith is, that their Belief of the Principles of Religion was never well rooted and fixed in their Understandings.

But if we are rationally convinced of these Truths, and yet our Belief is not effectual to reform our Lives, the Reason of this must be, that we do not really consider them. The Understanding hath not such an absolute Power over the Will, as necessarily to determine it to what is best, for our Wills stubbornly refuse the

cleareſt Evidence and ſtrongeſt Reaſons, if what is propoſed be contrary to our fleſhly and worldly Luſts.

As our Will is moved by the Underſtanding to obey its Dictates, ſo is it alſo moſt importunately ſolicited by our Appetites and Luſts to gratify their ſeveral Deſires and Propenſities. Hence a great Conflict often ariſes between the Truths of Religion, which are propoſed by our Underſtandings, and ſuch things as proceed from our inferior ſenſitive Faculties; our Luſts being checked and croſſed by the Hopes and Fears of another Life, tempt us to deny the Principles of Religion, and with all their Power ſtrive to oppoſe the Entertainment of them in our Minds. Thus it was with the Jews when our Saviour was on Earth; they could not reſiſt thoſe undoubted Teſtimonies which he gave of his being the Son of God; but yet the Love of this World, or Fear of Sufferings, ſo far prevailed over their Wills, as to prevent their becoming his Diſciples. Though "many of the chief Rulers believed on him, yet becauſe of the Phariſees they did not confeſs him, leſt they ſhould be put out of the Synagogue. For they loved the Praiſe of Men more than the Praiſe of God."

It is not, therefore, enough that the Truths of Religion ſubdue our Underſtanding by the Evidence of Reaſon, but they muſt alſo conquer our Wills and Affections

ſections before they can have any laſting Effect on our Lives. Till our Belief hath powerfully wrought on our Love, Hope, and Fear; it can have but little Influence on our Actions.

The Way to obtain this Conſent of our Wills and Affections to any Truth propoſed by our Underſtandings, is often moſt ſeriouſly to conſider the immenſe Greatneſs of the Happineſs afforded to us; the Extremity of the Miſery threatend; how dreadful our Condition will be, if we careleſsly neglect to provide for it; and how infinitely the Glory of Heaven ſurpaſſes all the Pleaſures of this Life.

If we repreſent and fix in our Minds ſuch Things as theſe, they will by Degrees ſo captivate our Wills and Affections, as to make us regard and value this future Happineſs as our greateſt Good, and to avoid eternal Miſery as the greateſt Evil that can poſſibly befal us. The Concerns of Eternity are of ſuch infinite Moment, that if we do but patiently attend to, and freely think about them; if we will not ſuffer our Luſts to biaſs our Judgments, or ſtifle theſe Principles of Religion; they will at laſt awaken our Conſcience, and prevail above all Temptations. And when our Faith, by frequent and ſerious Conſideration on theſe important Concerns, hath conquered our Minds and Wills, then will our Actions naturally follow. For Men will live

and act agreeably to what they love, deſire, hope for, or fear. — So effectually hath Chriſtianity provided for the Happineſs of Men, that nothing can make us miſerable, but either not believing, or not duly conſidering the great Arguments of Religion.

But further, And to preſerve us from any Backſliding, we ſhould conſider well what That particular Enticement was, which, in the Days of our Irreſolution, more eaſily betrayed us into Sin: This we ſhould be more immediately mindful to guard againſt, and to counteract, by every Virtue moſt oppoſite to it.

There is ſome particular Sin in every Conſtitution; ſome great and ruling Infirmity that damps all our good Reſolutions, and will continue ſo to do, till, by a direct Oppoſition of ourſelves to it, we have conquered and removed it. When we have cut-off this Right-Hand, and plucked-out this Right-Eye, (i.e) ſacrifiſed the darling Luſt of our Heart, we may then hope that the greateſt Part of the Difficulty is over, and that no leſs powerful Temptation will be able to draw us aſide. But, — Until this is done, in vain are all our other Attempts; for, while "the great Offence" has yet any Hold upon us, nothing will be done to any real Purpoſe; but he that is divided in his Opinion, and wavering in his Practice, will divided and wavering ſtill.

When

When we have thus ſettled our Faith upon good Grounds, and armed ourſelves againſt thoſe "Sins which do more eaſily beſet us," we muſt take Care, in the next Place, not to come within the Reach of Temptation too ſoon, whilſt we are but young and tender in the Paths of our particular Duties, leſt haply our good Purpoſes ſhould be blaſted in their firſt Growth, and we ſhould be drawn back again to our former Unſettledneſs; but let us root and ground ourſelves in the Faith by every reaſonable Conviction, and confirm the ſame by an anſwerable Life and Converſation; ſo ſhall it happen, that as our good Practice took-riſe at firſt from our good Opinions, ſo ſhall our Opinions be ſtrengthened afterwards by our Practice; till both being confirmed in us, we ſhall then be enabled to "ſtand in the evil Day," and not be afraid of any thing that may ſhake our Steadfaſtneſs.

Thus living in the true Faith and Fear of God, we ſhall ever keep our final Happineſs in View, and be fixed to a Point; and be no longer driven by every Wind of Opinion, and Impulſe of Paſſion, or Blaſt of Temptation; but be ſteady, uniform, and conſtant in the right Way.

This will be a wonderful Satisfaction to us, however little Progreſs we make in it.

Tho we move but ſlow, it is a Comfort to think we

are right. And — It is much better to be ſlow and cautious in the right Way, than ſwift and confident in the wrong — But,

Laſtly, If to theſe Endeavours we join fervent and unwearied Prayer to God for the Aids and Supports of his Grace, we ſhall aſſuredly from thence be made perfect at laſt; be "eſtabliſhed, ſtrengthened, ſettled;" We ſhall have a new Heart created in us, which will enable us to be "ſtedfaſt, immoveable, and always abounding in the Work of the Lord."

All that remains, is, to addreſs thoſe who call themſelves Chriſtians, and ſincerely believe the great Truths of the Goſpel, and particularly the Glories of a future State, that they make theſe the governing Principles of their Lives.

He who hath this eternal State ever preſent to his Mind, is fortified againſt all the Temptations of this World, either as to the Sufferings of this Life, or the being enticed by any of its alluring Charms and Enjoyments.

When the Soul, by Faith, views that Place where his God and Saviour lives, how mean and contemptible, vile and ſordid, will all things here below appear? Faith looks beyond this preſent Scene of Life; it beholds this World diſſolved, all the Glory and Pomp of it vaniſhing; and this Curtain being drawn, there appears

pears a new World to his View, wherein are Joys, Pleaſures, and Honours, ſubſtantial and eternal; the Proſpect of which leſſens his Eſteem for all things temporal. This Faith will inſpire and animate us with ſuch Courage and Reſolution, as to make us deſpiſe all Difficulties and Dangers, and to think eternal Happineſs to be ſufficient Amends for any Pains or Trouble to procure it. This conquers the Love of Life itſelf, which, though moſt deeply implanted in our Natures, yet thoſe who have been endued with this Faith, "have not counted their Lives dear to them, ſo that they might finiſh their Courſe with Joy. (*)

Such a Faith will fill the Soul with conſtant Peace and Satisfaction; ſo that a good Man may delight himſelf with unſeen Pleaſures, which the worldly Man knows,

(*) The Exploits and Atchievements of Faith, may be ſeen at large in the 11th Chapter of the Hebrews, for the Encouragement of all true Believers. But yet far greater and more ſtupendous are the Triumphs of Faith, recorded of the holy Lives and patient Deaths of the bleſſed Apoſtles, primitive Martyrs, and Confeſſors, who with invincible Conſtancy endured Pains and Torments, being only aſſiſted by the Grace of God, and a lively Faith in his Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jeſus Chriſt. They rejoiced and ſang Praiſes in the midſt of ſcorching Flames, they took joyfully the ſpoiling of their Goods, and gave God Thanks that they were counted worthy to ſuffer for his Name, and doubtleſs God's Grace with the like Faith would produce in us the ſame Effects, and enable us to do or ſuffer any thing with the ſame Joy and Reſolution.

knows not any thing of: this makes him content with whatever is here allotted him, and to be very little concerned about the Affairs of this Life. He chiefly converſes with inviſible Objects, and therein finds that ſolid and laſting Comfort, which all things temporal can neither give nor take away.

This Faith cheers his Spirits under all Calamities and Afflictions; and when wearied, or not pleaſed with the Impertinences of this Life, he can entertain his Mind with thoſe raviſhing Joys that will never cloy nor ſatiate.

This Faith will arm a good Man againſt the Fear of Death, and ſtrip that King of Terrors of all that is dreadful; who conſiders it only as God's Meſſenger to free him from an earthly Priſon, and to conduct him to a Place of eternal Bliſs and Happineſs.

All this, and much more, will a ſincere and hearty Faith effect; it will afford us a Fore-taſte of this immortal happy State, gives us, in Part, an Entrance into Heaven, and at laſt the complete Enjoyment of it.

Let it then plainly appear by our Words and Actions, what our Faith, and Hope is; and that we walk by Faith, not by Sight or Senſe. Senſe is a mean low Principle, confined to this World, and can extend no further than to things preſent and viſible. But the Juſt live by Faith; they govern their Actions not by what

what they ſee, but by what they believe and hope for, looking beyond this Life for ſuch things as are eternal. Let us not be aſhamed of this our Deſign before Men; but whatever they think of us, let us reſolve to be for ever happy, and to uſe this World as if we were ſhortly to leave it; ſo to improve our Time, as to remember it will ſoon be ſwallowed up in Eternity. And bleſſed be God, who hath ſet before us ſuch mighty Hopes, given us ſuch glorious Promiſes, made ſuch a plain and clear Revelation of this eternal Life, by Jeſus Chriſt, and by him taught us the true Way of obtaining it; who, having ſuffered for our Sins in our Nature, entered into the higheſt Heavens, to prepare Manſions of Glory for all his faithful Followers.

To Conclude, Nature urgeth us to Inconſtancy; therefore, we ſhould guard ourſelves at all Times againſt it.

"We are from the Womb of our Mother various and wavering: and from the Loins of our Father inherit we Inſtability; how then ſhall we be firm?

"Thoſe who gave us a Body, furniſhed us with Weakneſs; but he who gave us a Soul, armed us with Reſolution; Let us therefore employ it, and be wiſe; let us be wiſe, and we are happy. For, Virtue is a ſteady Principle, and gives Stability to every thing "elſe. (*)

(*) Conſtancy of Mind gives a Man Reputation, and makes him happy in Deſpite of all Misfortunes. Serm. CCCLIII.

"Beware of Irreſolution in the Intent of thy Actions; beware of Inſtability in the Execution of them: ſo ſhalt thou triumph over two great Failings of thy Nature.

"What reproacheth Reaſon more than to act Contraries? What can ſuppreſs the Tendencies to theſe, but Firmneſs of Mind?

"The Inconſtant feeleth that he changeth, but he knoweth not why: he ſeeth that he eſcapeth from himſelf, but he perceiveth not how. Be thou incapable of Change in That which is right, and Men will rely upon thee.

"Eſtabliſh unto thyſelf right Principles of Action, and ſee that thou ever act according to them.

"Undertake nothing raſhly, nor perform with a cold Indifference: the One ſhews a weak Mind, the Other a ſlothful Diſpoſition. Yea,

"So deliberate, that you may reſolve; ſo reſolve, that you may perform; and ſo perform, that you may perſevere; for Mutability is the Badge of Infirmity.

"Firſt know that thy Principles are juſt, then be thou inflexible in them. (*) "Do

(*) As much of the Comfort of our Actions depends on the Motives by which we are influenced, it is prudent to be cool and deliberate in entering upon any new Concern. — Wiſdom requires three things; Knowledge to diſcern, Judgment to weigh, and Reſolution to determine. — We ſhould undertake Actions deliberately; but having undertaken them, we ſhould go through.

"Do nothing without Advice, and when thou hast done it, repent not. Go not in the Way wherein thou mayest fall; so shall thy Passions have no Rule over thee; so shall thy Constancy ensure unto thee the Good thou possessest, and drive from thy Door Misfortune. Anxiety and Disappointment shall be Strangers to thy Gates.

"The Inconstant hath no Peace in his Soul; neither can any be at Ease whom he concerneth himself with. His Life is unequal; his Motions are irregular; his Soul changeth with the Wind. To-day he loveth thee, To-morrow thou art detested by him; and why? himself knoweth not wherefore he loved, or wherefore he now hateth. (*)

"To-day he is the Tyrant, To-morrow thy Servant is not less humble; and why? He who is arrogant without Power, will be servile where there is no Subjection.

"To-day he is profuse, To-morrow he grudgeth unto his Mouth that which it should eat. Thus it is with him who knoweth not Moderation – How should his Actions be right, who hath no Rule of Life? Nothing can be just, which proceedeth not from Reason.

"Who shall say of the Comeleon, He is black; when, the Moment after, the Verdure of the Grass overspreadeth him. Who shall say of the Inconstant, he

(*) See the Note, Page 358, 359.

he is joyful, when his next Breath ſhall be ſpent in Sighing?

"What is the Life of ſuch a Man but the Phantom of a Dream? In the Morning he riſeth happy, at Noon, he is on the Rack; this Hour he is a God, the next, below a Worm; one Moment he laugheth, the next he weepeth; he now willeth, in an Inſtant he willeth not, and in another he knoweth not whether he willeth or no.

"Yet neither Eaſe nor Pain fix themſelves on him; neither is he wanda greater, or become leſs; neither hath he had Cauſe for Laughter, nor Reaſon for Sorrow; therefore ſhall none of them abide with him. His Happineſs is as a Palace built on the Surface of the Sand; the Blowing of the Wind carrieth away the Foundation: no Wonder then that it falleth.

"Thus it is with the Inconſtant: Whilſt the Man, who is firm and reſolute, advances in an even and uninterrupted Courſe. His Foot is on the Earth, and his Head above the Clouds.

"On his Brow ſitteth Majeſty; Steadineſs is his Port; and in his Heart reigneth Tranquility.

"Tho Obſtacles appear in his Way, he deigneth not to look down upon them; tho' Heaven and Earth oppoſe his Paſſage, he proceedeth. The Mountains ſink beneath his Tread; the Waters of the Ocean are dried

up

up under his Feet. The Tyger throweth herſelf acroſs his Way in vain; the Spots of the Leopard glow againſt him unregarded.

"He marcheth thro the embattled Legions; with his Hand he putteth aſide the Terrors of Death. Storms roar againſt his Shoulders, but are not able to ſhake them; The Thunder burſteth over his Head in vain; the Lightening ſerveth but to ſhew the Glories of his Countenance. (*)

"He cometh from the uttermoſt Parts of the Earth; he ſeeth Happineſs afar off before him; his Eye diſcovereth her Temple beyond the Limits of the Pole; he walketh up to it, he entereth boldly, and remaineth there forever.

"Eſtabliſh thy Heart, therefore, in that which is right, and then know, that the greateſt of human Praiſe is to be immutable."

"Whatſoever thou takeſt in Hand, remember the End, and thou ſhalt never do amiſs."

(*) See Note (‡) Page 353, 354.

Sermon

SERMON CCCLIV.

On universal Obedience, in Oppoſition to Inconſtancy, Fickleneſs, &c.

James ii. 10. "Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole "Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty "of all."

If this Paſſage of Scripture were duly conſidered by all thoſe who pretend to receive it, with the reſt of the holy Bible, as the Word of God, they would not content themſelves with ſuch a defective Obedience as but too many of them are known to do.

It is eaſy to obſerve, that Perſons, profeſſing to be Chriſtians, frequently allow themſelves Liberties very contrary to that Strictneſs of Life & Behaviour, which the plain and undoubted Meaning of the Apoſtle, in the Text, requires from them.

An univerſal, ſteady, and uniform Obedience to all the Laws of the Goſpel, without Reſerve or Exception, is here moſt evidently required from us. It is certain, that no Excuſe is here allowed for the Tranſgreſſion of any Law; and that the Precepts of God, in Scripture,

ture, are alike made the Rule of our Obedience. (*)

In ſpeaking, therefore, to theſe Words, I ſhall,

Firſt, State the true Meaning and Import of them:

And then, Secondly, The Reaſonableneſs and Equity of the Doctrine contained in them.

Concluding with ſuch Inferences as ſhall reſult from the whole. And,

Firſt, The Apoſtle cannot ſurely mean to affirm, that he who is a Tranſgreſſor in one Point, is, for that Reaſon, a Tranſgreſſor of all and every Article, ſo as, by being guilty only of a ſingle Offence, he ſhould thereby involve himſelf in the Guilt of every other Tranſgreſſion; No: but only, that there is no balancing of Accounts in Religion, as ſome vainly imagine; and that Juſtification is not to be had upon a partial Obedience; but that the Obſervance of the WHOLE Law of God, without Exceptions to any particular Branches of it, is bound upon us.

He who offends only in ONE Point, does thereby gainſay the Authority of God, and reject the Counſel of the Moſt-High. There is a "Curſe denounced upon every One that continueth not in ALL Things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them." And the ſame Curſe muſt have been on us all, if Chriſt had

(*) Scripture, as a Rule of Faith and Life, is not one Text, but all. Serm. CCCLIV.

had not redeemed us from it; "The Wages of Sin is Death;" and the Apoſtle (in the Words before us) aſſerts that there is ſuch a Complication of all the Precepts of the Law of God, both with one another, and with the Authority of the Law-giver, that "He who offends in one Point, is guilty of all."

A Man may, by one Inſtance of Tranſgreſſion, as well as by more, be juſtly charged as guilty before God.

There is no Difficulty at all in conceiving the Matter, when taken in this View. And,

This Interpretation of the Apoſtle's Meaning in the Text receives great Strength and Confirmation, from what immediately follows, which he gives as a Reaſon and Proof of the Truth of what he had aſſerted.

"He that ſaid, do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, do not kill; if therefore thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law."

The Apoſtle's Argument, whereby he ſupports what he had ſaid of a Man's being "guilty of the whole Law" by one Offence, is grounded entirely upon this, that all Laws, as well againſt one Sin as another, have all of them one and the ſame Author.

A Man, therefore, who tranſgreſſeth only in one Point, doth thereby renounce, and inſult the Authority upon which the whole Law ſubſiſts; for, it is the ſame Law-giver and the ſame Authority which enjoins one

Pre-

Precept as another; and, in offending againſt One, we offend againſt the Authority which enforces the whole. (*)

He who commits Murder, in Contrariety to any temporal Law, is as liable to Puniſhment, as guilty in the Face of the Law, and is as ſure to ſuffer, as if, to Murder, he had added every other Tranſgreſſion.

Let us be careful, therefore, not to deceive ourſelves, as if our Obedience to ſome would atone for our Breach of others of the divine Laws; for, "he that offends in one Particular, is as liable to Condemnation, as if he had offended in all."

The Doctrine, the Purport, and Meaning, then, of the Text, is plainly this, [viz]

"That an impartial, uniform, and univerſal Obedience to the Laws of the Goſpel, is what is required of all Chriſtians;" "That we be ſincere, and without Offence;"

(*) Religion, like every regular and well-connected Syſtem, is compoſed of a Variety of Parts, each of which poſſeſſes its ſeparate Importance, and contributes to the Perfection of the whole.

Every Article of Faith, and every Command of Duty is eſtabliſhed by the ſame Authority; and therefore, even thoſe of the loweſt Order, when attended with their proper Evidence, riſe into Importance, and carry Obligation along with them. See the Note, Vol. ix. Page 378.

Offence;" "entire, wanting nothing." (*) So that it will be in vain for any One to hope for Peace with God for the willing Breach of one Law, by even the moſt punctual Obſervance of all the reſt.

The Reaſonableneſs and Equity of which, will, we think,

Secondly, Be evident to all upon a due Conſideration of the following Particulars: — As,

1ſt. The Reaſonableneſs of ſuch an Obedience is evident, becauſe, whatever falls ſhort of it cannot be ſincere. — For,

He, who reſerves to himſelf the Liberty of yielding to a favourite Vice, or neglecting a neceſſary Duty, doth thereby plainly ſhew, that in his religious Conduct he is governed by a Principle not truly ſincere; if he was, it would have effectually wrought upon him in This Inſtance, as well as in That, and would have reſtrained his irregular Deſires, with the ſame Power and

(*) Religion affects and poſſeſſes the whole Man: in the Underſtanding, it is Knowledge; in the Life, it is Obedience; in the Affections, it is Delight in God; in our Carriage and Behaviour, it is Modeſty, Calmneſs, Gentleneſs, Quietneſs, Candour, Ingenuity; and in our Dealings, it is Uprightneſs and Integrity, and correſponds with the Rule of Righteouſneſs in all things.

Religion makes Men virtuous in all Inſtances. It has different Denominations and Names for different Actions and Circumſtances, but it is One thing, [viz] univerſal Righteouſneſs.

The ſmalleſt Defect obſcures the whole Orb of our Virtues; we cannot tranſgreſs, but we are liable to Puniſhment.

and Effect in EVERY Inſtance, as well as in ANY; in one Caſe, as well as in another.

The Truth is, he allows himſelf in This, and not in That Tranſgreſſion, becauſe the one is, and the other is not, the Sin of his Inclination; (*) or, becauſe he is tempted to the One, and not to the other.

Whereas, a ſincere Principle of Obedience would carry him uniformly through the whole, as then having an equal Regard to all God's Commands. (‡) — Now,

If This be the Caſe; if the Reaſon why we do not commit EVERY Sin, as "the Sins which do ſo eaſily beſet us," be, becauſe we are not equally tempted to them; then, there is all the Reaſon in the World to think, that the ſame Weakneſs of Faith which makes a Man to give-way to Temptation in one Caſe, would certainly do ſo in every other, were the Temptation equal; and, certainly, an Obedience thus without Principle will never be accepted by God, as a reaſonable Service." (†)

It

(*) "Who can ſay, I have made my Heart clean; I am wholly pure from my Sin?" Few of Adam's Children are ſo happy as not to be born without ſome Bias in their natural Temper, which it is the Buſineſs of Education, either to take-off, or counter-balance.

Every Man has his genial Vices, his complexional Errors; and tho he may appear a Saint in all things elſe, yet in theſe, it is to be feared, he will be found a Sinner.

(‡) He that turns not from every Sin, turns not aright from any Sin.

(†) *Uſus Facit Virtutes, non Natura.* Serm. CCCLIV.

It is impoſſible to hate Sin, upon a juſt Foundation, whilſt we entertain an Affection for any particular Sin. This may be more convenient, and another leſs; but, we cannot abſtain from either, with a due Regard to the Honour of God, or a perfect Senſe of the Baſeneſs of Sin, unleſs we are reſolved to abſtain from both.

You would follow your Redeemer, no Doubt, where the Road is ſmooth; when it grows rugged and tedious, you would ſtop ſhort and forſake him; you would compliment your Maſter with doing ſo much of his Service as coſts you no Trouble, and where That begins, your Religion ends; (i.e) you generouſly renounce thoſe Vices to which you have no Propenſity, but throw the Rein upon the Neck of thoſe Paſſions which ſolicit you with Pleaſure.

Is this the Reſult of your Chriſtian Warfare, to make gallant Shew and Promiſe of Courage, when no Enemy appears; to turn your back on the firſt Alarm of his Approach? Is this a Struggle deſerving that high Prize which is reſerved only for thoſe who, by patient Continuance in well-doing, ſeek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality?

Do you call this ſubduing your Paſſions, to change a Vice which is worn out, and you are tired of, for One that is more agreeable to you, and has Novelty to recommend it? And

And is This the Method of reconciling yourſelf to your Maker? It is abſurd, it is impracticable; you cannot divide yourſelf between God and any of your Inclinations. He admits of no Competitor; and if you give him not ALL your Heart, and ALL your Soul, he will accept of none of it.

Let not any One, therefore, ſatisfy himſelf, becauſe he is not as other Men are, while he is only diſtinguiſhed from them by his particular Vices: and if not overcome by Drunkenneſs, yet is addicted to Luſt; and if free from Drunkneſs and Luſt, is yet poſſeſſed with Phariſaical Pride, baſe Cunning, or treacherous Diſſimulation. — But,

Secondly, The Reaſonableneſs of God's requiring from us an univerſal Obedience, without allowing Men to make Exceptions of any particular Law, according to their Humour or Fancy will further appear, if we conſider, that all Men allow the Juſtice of God's puniſhing all Tranſgreſſions, ſave only ſuch as They delight in.

The covetous Man, for Inſtance, ſeverely arraigns the Sins of Profaneneſs and Prodigality: whilſt They, at the ſame Time, are as forward in paſſing a juſt Cenſure on his Unmercifulneſs, and heathen Idolatry. (*)

The

(*) *Clodius accuſat Mœchos.*
Avari Avaros, Gloriæ Cupidi, gloriosè reprehendunt; eſt enim Pro-

The Exceptions which Men make of the Sins of their own particular Inclinations, are all of them the Effects of Prejudice and Partiality, and ſerve to ſhew how weak Men can be, and how groſsly they can impoſe upon themſelves, when they are reſolved not to part with a beloved Sin.

The ſame Vices which are deformed and inſupportable in others, we do not ſee in ourſelves: They are not burthenſome to us, but ſeem to reſt without Weight, as in their proper Centers. — But,

No Man's Blindneſs to his own Defects or Fondneſs for a particular Vice, can alter the Nature of it, or make it the leſs diſpleaſing to God.

From the Acknowledgment, therefore, which all Men are ready to make of the Guilt of any Sin, in every Caſe but their own, it follows, that, according to the unprejudiced and impartial Judgment of all Men, Sin deſerves Puniſhment; and that it is highly reaſonable that Men ſhould be required to avoid all Sin, and to obey all God's Laws without Exception.

And that it is highly juſt and reaſonable that God ſhould require an univerſal Obedience to all the Laws of the Goſpel, will moreover appear, from the many and

prium Stultitiæ, aliorum Vitia cernere, et obliviſci ſuorum.

"When the Ungodly curſeth Satan, he curſeth his own Soul." See Rom. ii. 17—23.

and great Abſurdities which would follow from our ſuppoſing the Caſe to be otherwiſe.

It is well known, that Men have not, all of them, one and the ſame favourite Vice; if, therefore, every Man is to be indulged in the Sin of his Inclination, THEN, what Sin is there to which ſome one or other would not be inclined; conſequently, a more common and univerſal Diſſoluteneſs of Manners would prevail in the World than did ever yet, in the worſt of Times.

To think, then, of coming to a Compoſition with God, by offering Him Part of our Duty, when the Whole is required of us: To imagine that He will accept ſuch a ſmall Pittance of Service, as our Luſts will afford Him, muſt be truly affronting: To ſingle out ſome Parts of our Duty as obligatory, and to reject others, which have the ſame binding Sanction, becauſe they interfere with ſome beloved Inclination; This is ſubverſive of God's whole Authority over us.

To obey God rightly, is to obey him thoroughly, which can never be done while He only maintains a divided Empire in our Breaſts.

The main Proof of our Virtue is, the Aſcendency of it in every Point.

The Man who conſtantly practiſeth any one Virtue, merely becauſe it is the Will of God, will be diſpoſed to practiſe every other Virtue for the ſame Reaſon.

No one great Virtue that is performed upon Principle will come alone: "The Virgins," the Virtues, "that be her Fellows, will bear her Company, and will with Joy and Gladneſs enter into" the ſame Heart. (*)

It is in vain for Men to ſhelter themſelves under a groundleſs Diſtinction, or to think themſelves ſafe becauſe their Sins are not of the moſt preſumptuous Kind; for, allowing that their Sins are comparatively ſmall; yet, if wilful and unrepented of, they will be ſufficient to defeat all our Hopes of Happineſs hereafter.

He then obeys not God rightly, in the Scripture Senſe, who obeys him not thoroughly, in ſome Inſtances only, and not in all. "No Man (ſays our Bleſſed Saviour) can ſerve two Maſters." And the Pſalmiſt places his Confidence in This only, that "he had Reſpect unto all God's Commandments."

Generally ſpeaking, moſt Men's Temptation lies principally in ſome one particular Inſtance, and This is the proper Trial of their Obedience; — If we overcome in this Inſtance, then we may have Confidence towards God, — but if we fail here, and continue ſo to do, "we are guilty of all."

We

(*) Aim at Excellence in all Actions: That Man will fail at laſt, that allows himſelf one ſinful Thought. He that dares to be wicked for his Advantage, will always be ſo, if his Intereſt requires it.

We muſt forſake the Sin, then, that moſt eaſily beſets us, and endavour to improve daily in every Grace, aiming at the Character given in the Goſpel of Zacharias, "who was a perfect Man, and walked in all the Commandments of the Lord blameleſs." The Meaning is, not that our Obedience can in this Life be indeed ſinleſs, but that we muſt be ſincere in endeavouring to avoid all Sin, according to the Meaſure and Capacity of our Ability, till at laſt we be preſented really faultleſs before the Preſence of God, through Chriſt, with Glory and exceeding Joy.

The Conqueſt over our natural and conſtitutional Vices is the very Condition of Chriſtianity, and is That upon which our Salvation depends.

But, after all, Temptations have not that mighty over-bearing Force in them which is ſo generally alledged: The Strength and Power they have, is greatly owing to the Perverſeneſs of our own Hearts, and in our previous Diſpoſition to Sin. — In a Word:

If we only forego thoſe Crimes for which we have no Inclination, "what Reward have we?" What do we more than others? Do not even the Publicans, do not even the Sinners the ſame?"

But, to abſtain from Sins to which we have a ſtrong in-bred Propenſion; to combat each inordinate Affection "that wars againſt the Soul;" and to reſiſt there,

where there is a ſtrong Conflict between Nature and Grace; This is the only deciſive Proof of our Obedience to God. (*)

It is not one ſingle Accompliſhment, how ſplendid or excellent ſoever, that conſtitutes the Beauty of a Chriſtian Life; No: but it is the Combination and Aſſemblage of all the moral Graces & Virtues together, as far as in us lies. What avails one glaring Action, one ſhining Quality, or more, which is not uniform and agreeable with the reſt of our Conduct?

"It is but as a Piece of new Cloth ſewn upon an old Garment," every where elſe deſpicably poor.

It only ſerves to upbraid, by its ridiculous Splendor, the

(*) A ſkilful Aſtrologer, (a Stranger to Socrates) upon calculating his Nativity, delineated him an Ill-tempered Man; For which his Ability was ſufficiently queſtioned. But the good Philoſopher juſtified the Artiſt, ſaying, "Such as he repreſents me to be, I was born; but ſince that Time I have been born again, and my ſecond Nativity hath croſſed my firſt."

The ſtronger the Oppoſition, the more noble the Combat. Where there is no Conteſt, there is no Victory; for, how can he exerciſe the Gift of Contentment, if all things ſucceed well? or that of Forgiveneſs, if we have no Enemies? if Men could not be angry, they could not be meek; and if they had no Inclination to Vice, they could not be virtuous, ſince Virtue is no more than the ſubduing of our vicious Inclinations. Virtue is made for Difficulties, and grows ſtronger and brighter for ſuch Trials.

the Homelineſs and Coarſeneſs of all the reſt. (*)

To Conclude: The Majority of Mankind will never be profeſſed Infidels; the great Danger is, that they will be only "almoſt Chriſtians," without being altogether ſo. To throw off all Obedience to God is too preſumptuous, whilſt to obey Him in Part only," though but in Appearance, carries with it a Form of Godlineſs.

The Caſe of the Generality of Chriſtians is ſuch, that if a Man be not licentious, if he doth not notoriouſly tranſgreſs, he is apt to think himſelf very far advanced in his Chriſtian Progreſs. — But,

The Goſpel requires much more than this. Such a negative Righteouſneſs will not ſuffice. We muſt not

(*) It is with Glory, as with Beauty; for as a ſingle fine Lineament cannot make a handſome Face, ſo neither can a ſingle good Quality render a Man accompliſhed; but a Concourrence of many fine Features and good Qualities make true Beauty and true Honour.

It is a falſe, as well as a foolish Concluſion to argue from a *particular* to an *univerſal* Truth. No Man can be accounted univerſally good from the Practice of one ſingle Virtue; not temperate becauſe he is ſtout; nor liberal becauſe he is exactly juſt. One Day cannot render a Man completely happy in Point of Time; nor one Action conſummate his Glory in Point of Valour. In ſhort, The right Way in judging of things, beyond Impoſition and Fallacy, is, not from Particulars, but Univerſals. *Una Hirundo non facit Ver.*

Quid juvat unum Vitium eripuiſſe, ſi alia ſuperſunt et torquent? Quid prodeſt Avaritiam expuenaſſe, ſi Ambitio, ſi Ira, Metus, Superſtitio, &c. Animum adhuc tuum obſideant et torquent? Serm. 354

not only effect that, but we must do Good; in which only the great and prime Parts of our Religion are to be regarded by us, but we are to descend even to the lowest Particulars of our Christian Duty, and perform every thing that is commendable and praise-worthy, "adorning the Doctrine of God our Saviour Jesus Christ in all things." (*)

In the Examination of ourselves, therefore, we should be exceeding careful not to be too favourable in the Judgment we pass upon the State and Condition of our Souls, lest we cry Peace, Peace, where there is no Peace;" but examine ourselves thoroughly, as those who would perform an acceptable Service to God.

Men are too apt to place the Whole of their Religion in those particular Duties which they themselves discharge, without attending to what the Law of God requires in other Cases; and so are apt to overlook many things which are as necessary as those which we already perform. — But,

The Strictness and Perfection of the Gospel doth not allow such Liberties: No; there is no excepted Case in which it is lawful for a Man to transgress: For, "He that offends in one Point is guilty of all."

It should be our greatest Care and Endeavour, therefore, to make a continual Progress in our Christian

(*) See the next Sermon.

tian Courſe; to proceed from Strength to Strength, and from one Degree of Virtue to another, till we come to be "perfect Men in Chriſt Jeſus;" for, "the Path of the Juſt is as the ſhining Light, which ſhineth more and more unto perfect Day." — Upon the Whole:

If the Terms or Conditions of Salvation are ſo ſtrict; if no Obedience that is leſs than univerſal will ſuffice; if the wilful and unrepented Tranſgreſſion of any One known Law will deprive Men of Happineſs, and make them liable to Condemnation, what Words can expreſs the Dreadfulneſs of their Condition who have lived, I do not ſay, in the Breach of ONE Commandment only, but of almoſt every One; who have been ſo far from obeying in ALL Inſtances of their known Duty, that they have hardly been obedient in any! — If the Breach of the LEAST of God's Commandments will exclude from Heaven, what will be their Fate who have tranſgreſſed the GREATEST!

If no Pretence will excuſe our Compliance with Temptation, how grievouſly will they enhance their Puniſhment who "draw Sin to them with Cords of Vanity, and ſin, as it were, with a Cart-rope," and "commit all Wickedneſs with Greedineſs!"

In a Word: "If the Righteous ſhall ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the Ungodly and the Sinner appear?"

Sermon

SERMON CCCLV.

The great Importance of Inferior Duties.

Matt. xxiii. 23. "— Theſe ought ye to have done, "and not to leave the other undone."

Our Bleſſed Saviour, in theſe Words, expoſes the Hypocriſy of thoſe who, according to the proverbial Expreſſion then uſed, would "ſtrain at a Gnat and and ſwallow a Camel," or would with very tender Conſciences ſtick at ſmall Sins and make no Scruple at great Ones. "Woe unto you Scribes and Phariſees, Hypocrites; for ye pay Tithe of Mint, Aniſe, and Cummin, and have omitted the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy, and Faith. Theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

It muſt be acknowledged therefore, that the main Streſs of his Doctrine turns upon the greater and more important Duties; this being the Point he was directly inſiſting upon, according to the Scope and Tendency of his Argument, which was to reprehend the Phariſees for

for neglecting "the weightier Matters of the Law, Judgment, Mercy or Charity, and Faith:" but ſtill the Clauſe concerning "the Tithe of Mint, Aniſe, and and Cummin," has its Force; and this Duty likewiſe ought they to have done, or not to leave undone; for, it matters not to which Branch of the Text each of thoſe Expreſſions ſeverally relates, the Senſe being the ſame either Way, and all the Duties here mentioned being either way made neceſſary to be performed. The Leaſt are neceſſary to be performed. The Leaſt are neceſſary, though they will not (as thoſe Hypocrites would have had them,) be accepted in Lieu of the Greater.

In the Syſtems of Chriſtian Morality, the MORE EMINENT Virtues, and the MORE FLAGRANT Vices, are the perpetual Subjects of Diſcourſe; but very little Reflection has been made upon thoſe which are of an INFERIOR Conſideration. This Diſcourſe therefore ſhall be wholly grounded upon That Part of the Text which relates to the SMALLER Duties; and becauſe the Neglect of them is an Error of very dangerous Conſequence, I ſhall attempt to diſcuſs this Subject ſomewhat particularly, and in Purſuance of that Deſign, I ſhall proceed by the following Method:

Firſt, I ſhall conſider the preciſe Nature of the ſmaller and leſs regarded Inſtances of Duty and Tranſ-

greſſion, ſo as to adjuſt our Notions concerning them.

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew, that, in a practical and moral Senſe, no Duties or Sins, (all things conſidered,) can be little; and that it is neceſſary to have a ſtrict Regard even to thoſe which ſeem the leaſt important of both.

Thirdly, I ſhall offer ſome further Reflections, which may prevail with us to avoid even the ſmalleſt Sins, and to make our Obedience entire and complete.

As to the firſt of theſe, Three things ſeem obſervable.

1ſt. It is not here meant that we ſhould trouble and perplex ourſelves in Point of Religion about frivolous Circumſtances, which are neither commanded nor forbidden. Such a Trifle as this is not properly a SMALL Thing, but Nothing; nothing, we mean, in Religion, or to our preſent Purpoſe. It is fit for us indeed, and prudent, to avoid not only what is unlawful, but what is inexpedient, nay whatever is indecent or improper: and theſe laſt are to be ranked among thoſe things which are conſiderable in common Life, and are indeed not ſo much regarded as they ought to be. But let them be regarded ſtill only as Indecencies, or Improprieties, not as Sins: for in Reſpect of Religion, and the divine Laws, we ſhould not be ſuperſtitious or ſcrupulous in multiplying the Lines of Duty, and making thoſe things illegal which God has left indifferent. Theſe therefore are not the SMALL Things here intended.

2dly,

2dly, It is to be obſerved, on the other Hand, that ſome things ſeem to be LITTLE, which are really far from being ſo; and ſome are actually ſo in One Reſpect, but not in Others. The Beginnings of all Things are little, and yet they are of the greateſt Importance imaginable. The Obſervation of ſome particular Modes of Worſhip in the Church, and of ſome Injunctions in the State, which are wholly poſitive, and have no moral Goodneſs in their own Nature, may, and, it ſeems, do to ſome, appear very trivial Circumſtances: but ſuppoſing the Things are ſo in themſelves, yet Obedience to Governors, both civil and eccleſiaſtical, is a very IMPORTANT Duty, be the Matter of their Commands in its own Nature never ſo inconſiderable. This therefore is not a SMALL Thing, but only ſeems ſo: or even if it were, the Performance of it would notwithſtanding be neceſſary; as will appear from what ſhall be obſerved in its proper Place. At preſent I take-notice,

3dly, That, excluding both the foregoing Particulars, the things here meant are real Duties on the one Hand, in Oppoſition to the former; and really little Ones on the other Hand, in Oppoſition to the latter. For though all Duties are neceſſary to be performed, as we have Power and Opportunity; yet they may, and do, differ in Magnitude. The

The Doctrine, (for Inſtance) concerning the Equality of moral Virtues and Vices, may well paſs for a Paradox. It will be ſufficient in this Reſpect to conſider either Virtues or Vices, becauſe there is the ſame Reaſon for and againſt the Equality or Inequality of both.

That all Sins, then, are not of the ſame Size, is evident from that Expoſtulation of the Royal Pſalmiſt; "Who can underſtand his Errors? Cleanſe thou me from SECRET Faults. Keep back thy Servant alſo from PRESUMPTUOUS Sins; let them not have Dominion over me: then ſhall I be upright, and I ſhall be innocent from the great Tranſgreſſion." Here is a manifeſt Diſtinction made between ſmall and great Offences; and indeed, if Scripture were ſilent in this Matter, the Nature of the thing itſelf is plain in common Reaſon: the ſeveral Objects of ſeveral Crimes, the various Principles from which they proceed, and other Circumſtances with which they are attended, make a moſt material Difference between them, in Reſpect of Bulk and Dimenſions. The "idle Words" taken-notice of by our Saviour, or the "fooliſh Talking and Jeſting" mentioned by St. Paul, are Faults, and muſt be repented of; but ſure no one will ſay that they are as great Faults, as Injuſtice or Uncharitableneſs. All Sins, it is true, are alike Violations of Law; but ſtill

they

they differ in their preciſe ſpecific Natures; and, in a Word, though they are all equally Sins, yet they are not all equal Sins. There are, no Doubt, Degrees of Guilt; but then indeed we muſt conſider, on the other Hand, that in the leaſt it is Guilt ſtill.

To anſwer thoſe different Meaſures of Tranſgreſſion there are different Meaſures of Puniſhment; but then it muſt be remembered, that the leaſt Degree of eternal Miſery is inſupportable. (*)

Our Wiſdom, therefore, is rather to avoid all Sins in general, than to amuſe ourſelves with the various Diſtinctions between them. Which leads me to ſhew,

Secondly, That in a PRACTICAL and MORAL Senſe no Duties or Sins, all things conſidered, can be little; and that it is neceſſary to have a ſtrict Regard even to thoſe which ſeem the leaſt important of both. We ſay in a PRACTICAL and MORAL Senſe; becauſe it is not denied but that theſe, as well as all other things, may in their ABSTRACTED Natures be comparatively ſmall; for, (as already obſerved) Virtues and Vices are not equal. But then if we regard them on the whole, as they tend to promote or hinder our Happineſs, none of them can be accounted little, (i.e) inconſiderable, ſo as to deſerve to be ſlighted or overlooked by us; which is what we

(*) Whoſo ſins preſumptuouſly, in Hopes of a light Puniſhment, will, by that very Preſumption, merit a heavy one. Serm. 355.

we mean by LITTLE in a PRACTICAL or MORAL Senſe: And the Truth of the Aſſertion laid down will appear from the diſtinct Conſideration of theſe three following Particulars:

1ſt. That the leaſt Duties are in themſelves neceſſary to be performed, and the leaſt Sins to be avoided.

2dly, That ſmall things both in Duty and Tranſgreſſion, tend to great Ones.

3dly, That though, upon the whole, great Crimes are more dangerous than ſmall, yet in ſome particular Inſtances and Regards, the latter may be more ſo than the former.

And 1ſt. The leaſt Duties are in themſelves neceſſary to be performed, and the leaſt Sins to be avoided, becauſe our Obedience muſt be univerſal, and no Duty can ſuperſede the Obligation of another, be the Sizes or Degrees of them what they will. "Then ſhall I not be confounded, (ſays the Pſalmiſt,) when I have reſpect unto ALL thy Commandments;" and St. James aſſures us, that "whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all:" becauſe the Authority of the Legiſlator is as truly ſtruck-at by the Violation of one Part, as of the whole. (*)

He that indulges himſelf in one Vice, would do ſo in the Reſt, if he had the ſame Temptation; and that he

(*) See the laſt Diſcourſe.

he does not, is owing only to his Conſtitution, Temper, and other Circumſtances, which incline him to one or more Sins, and not to all: for as to the Authority of God, That he effectually ſets aſide by being wicked, though but in one ſingle Habit.

If ſuch a Perſon were aſked, what it is that hinders him from committing any One Sin, and he ſhould anſwer, that he abſtains from it, becauſe God has forbidden it, might he not be reaſonably aſked, does not the SAME God as much forbid ſuch another Sin? How then can he who pretends to be ſwayed by the divine Authority allow himſelf in This Sin, any more than in the other? This is St. James's Reaſoning in the Caſe; "He that ſaid, do not commit Adultery; ſaid alſo, do not kill; now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law."

To come cloſer to the Caſe (from which yet we have not properly digreſſed) all Duties are neceſſary, therefore, SMALL Ones. Here is no Diſtinction made about the Dimenſions of them.

As for the Doctrine about Sins mortal and venial, we have often proved it to be falſe and impious; tho the Uſe which ſome have made of it is abundantly evident.

All Sins are in their Nature mortal, by which (as we are all along to obſerve) it is not to be underſtood that every Error or Imperfection, no, nor very many

of them, are unpardonable; ſo far otherwiſe, that for thoſe a general Repentance will be ſufficient: (*) but only wilful, habitual, unrepented Sins are ſo, though never ſo little in their own Nature.

Single Acts, nay very many of them, will be forgiven, even in thoſe Sins which are of a high and heinous Nature, provided they are repented of, and reformed; much more in the lower and leſs important Inſtances; only no Sin is ſo ſmall, but that the known unrepented Habit of it is mortal; and the Performance of no one Duty, though never ſo great, can evacuate the Obligation of another, though never ſo little.

That known Maxim, "Every Greater contains in it the Leſs," cannot take place here: it holds true, indeed, concerning the different Degrees of the ſame Quality, in which the Greater may be ſaid either to include or ſuperſede the Leſs, it matters not which, the thing being the ſame, though the Expreſſions are ſo very different. But in two or more diſtinct Qualities, which have their ſeparate Natures and Notions, there is no ſuch Principle to be admitted, particularly not in the Inſtance now before us.

A great Duty can in no Senſe be ſaid to ſuperſede a leſs, ſo as to cancel or annul its Obligation, nor to include, contain, or ſuppoſe it, any otherwiſe than as all

(*) See the Diſcourſes on ſecret Sins, &c. in this Volume.

all the Virtues in general, and ſome more eſpecially in particular, may be ſaid to be connected among themſelves: which is ſo far from proving againſt what has been diſcourſed, that it is a direct Confirmation of it; for, according to this, all the Duties, great and ſmall, muſt conſpire and fall in with one another; and this is the very thing for which we are now contending.

And indeed, That Maxim concerning the mutual Union of the Virtues, however it has been exploded (becauſe ill underſtood) as an empty ſcholaſtic Subtilty, is (if it be rightly ſtated) a certain and moſt important Truth, founded upon the Principles of common Reaſon. For not to mention the more cloſe Confederacy or Combination which there is between ſome particular Virtues, by Reaſon of the Affinity of their Natures, as between Humility and Contentment, Courage and Conſtancy, and the like, there is one common Notion in which they all agree; [viz] the ſincere, ingenuous, univerſal Principle of Virtue in general, involving the due Reverence paid to the Authority of the Legiſlator, and the entire Love of God and Goodneſs. Whoſoever is upon this Foundation really virtuous in one Inſtance, is ſo in all: (*) If he be virtuous upon This Principle, it will as ſurely influence all the Parts of his Duty, as the Soul actuates and enlivens all the Parts of

(*) See the firſt Sentence in Page 390. Serm. CCCLV.

of the Body. But what makes this Doctrine ſo difficult to be entertained, is the Fallacy of Men's ſeeming to be good in ſome Inſtances without really being ſo; they may do ſome Actions outwardly virtuous, and yet not be truly virtuous in any.

Chriſtian Obedience, then, ought to be like the Chriſtian Religion, entire, uniform, harmonious, and beautiful in its Symmetry, the Parts anſwering to each other, and the ſmall, as well as great, performing their ſeveral Functions.

Without this we can never be truly virtuous. We may as well expect to be in Health, when only our Heads and Limbs are ſound, and the unſeen Veſſels diſtempered; or to have a curious Machine go regular and exact, when none but the larger Wheels and Springs are in due Motion, the finer and more delicate Ones being broken, or out of Order.

Thus then, it appears that the ſmalleſt Duties are in themſelves neceſſary, therefore cannot be LITTLE in a practical or moral Senſe, (i.e) inconſiderable.

Becauſe 2dly, The ſmalleſt Things tend to the greateſt. That they are neceſſary in themſelves we have ſeen in the foregoing Particular. We are now conſidering the Relation they have to others. "He that contemneth SMALL Things (as the wiſe Son of Sirach obſerves) ſhall fall by little and little." As

As the things he contemns are ſmall, ſo will be the Degrees by which his Ruin approaches; but it will be Ruin ſtill, and That can never be little.

This Aphoriſm, indeed, is not wholly confined to religious Matters; the ſmall things here ſpoken of may not be Virtues and Vices only, but alſo Circumſtances, to be obſerved by human Prudence in Reſpect of temporal Intereſt and civil Life, in Policy, Œconomy, or common Converſation. But it is as much ſo in Morality as in any other.

How often has a vain Thought been blown-up into the wildeſt Extravagance! and one raſh Word been the Cauſe of a thouſand deliberately wicked Actions! What our Saviour therefore, upon another Occaſion, ſaid with Regard to Perſons, may be applied in general both to Perſons and Things, both to Duties and Tranſgreſſions: "Take heed that ye deſpiſe not One of theſe LITTLE Ones."

It would be endleſs, as well as ſuperfluous, to inſtance in Particulars; and the Caſe being ſo plain, I ſhall add no more upon it, but obſerve,

3dly, That though, upon the whole, great Crimes are more dangerous than ſmall Ones, yet in ſome particular Inſtances and Regards, the latter may be more ſo than the former.

Great Crimes are more pernicious when committed,

but ſmall Ones are more likely to be committed. None but very wicked Perſons can be frequently guilty of the former, but thoſe who are religiouſly diſpoſed may often fall into the latter. Even ſmall Faults, therefore, are to be carefully avoided; nay, they may, to ſome be the more dangerous for being ſmall, and their very Littleneſs may make them fatal. Crimes of a bigger Size would alarm us at the firſt Aſſault, and our Spirits would recoil at the very Mention of them; when theſe Other, being overlooked and unregarded, inſenſibly ſlide upon us: they are committed with little or no Reluctancy; and Shame, that great Guardian of Innocence, is not awakened by them. Such is the Deceitfulneſs of Sin, and the Inadvertency of our frail and depraved Nature. I proceed now,

Thirdly, In the third and laſt Place, to offer ſome further Conſiderations, which may prevail with us to avoid even the ſmalleſt Sins, and make our Obedience entire and complete.

This indeed, after what has been ſaid, may appear to be a ſuperfluous Talk, but ſince the Neceſſity of theſe Points has been urged, That may ſeem to ſuperſede all other Reflections: but it muſt be remembered, that the Subject we are upon is, not to be negligent of SMALL Things; and ſome Perſons may by theſe be led to conſider thoſe which are more important. To

To proceed, therefore: In other Cases, it is esteemed an Accomplishment to be accurate and exact; why should it not be so in Religion? I add, that, because This is a Matter of the highest Consequence, therefore it requires the less Exactness? If in Living, as in every thing else, "To be correct is to be elegant:" Why therefore, among other Circumstances, should we not be elegantly virtuous? And it must be remarked, that Elegancy ever consists in small things; and what is most unobserved is most delicate.

If we should not censoriously take notice of a "Mote in our Brother's Eye," yet we can never too curiously observe one in our own. And as Conscience is like the Eye in Respect of Discernment, we should labour to make it so in Respect of Sensation; to be exquisitely impatient of Pain; to smart at the lightest Impression, that by its perpetual Movement, it may discharge the smallest Offence that was pungent and uneasy.

This is, indeed a tender Conscience, in the true, proper, and religious Sense. Let us labour, therefore, to be accurate in Religion; and we may be so if we please, by the Grace of God assisting us, which will never be wanting to us, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

Let us labour to be, as St. James expresses it, "perfect and entire, and wanting nothing," (ie) to be habitual

tual in the Practice of all Virtues, as we have Power and Opportunity, and to all false Ways we should utterly abhor. For though our Obedience cannot be, strictly speaking, perfect in Degree, but the Merits of Christ, after all, must supply its Defects; yet it may, and ought to be entire in all its Parts: and if absolute unsinning Perfection be not required of us, Sincerity most certainly is.

And here we cannot but take notice, that though the Distinction between Perfection and Sincerity is frequently made, yet it is by no means so well understood as it ought to be; and that by Reason of a very dangerous Mistake in the Notion of Sincerity which is commonly supposed to imply much less than it really does.

Men are apt to flatter themselves that they are sincere, if they are not Hypocrites, commonly so called; if they do not prevaricate and dissemble with others, and have some hearty Wishes to Religion. But they are to consider that Sincerity is opposed not only to Dissimulation, but to a PARTIAL Obedience; or more properly, the latter involves the former: for if they habitually transgress but one Duty, they cannot be sincere in any, for Want of that universal ingenuous Principle: and so they dissemble with their own Souls, and are Hypocrites to themselves, and before God, whatever

ever they are, outwardly, unto Men. (*) Beſides, Sincerity, according to the original Signification of the Word in all Authors, and That particularly which is affixed to it in the Holy Scriptures, implies Integrity, (i.e) Soundneſs, as when it is applied to a Body which is entire in all its Parts; or to a Veſſel which has no Flaw, Defect, or Imperfection in it.

Simplicity or Singleneſs is likewiſe ſignified by it, as it is oppoſed to Mixture. Thus the Apoſtle, "In Simplicity and godly Sincerity we had our Converſation in the World."

Our Virtue, then, to be ſincere, muſt have no Mixture of Vice, of any known, wilful, & accuſtomed Sin, though in itſelf it be never ſo ſmall, and ſeemingly inconſiderable. The leaſt Ill-humour in the Blood and Vitals of our Religion taints the whole Maſs.

"Know ye not (ſays the ſame Apoſtle) that a little Leaven leaveneth the whole Lump? Purge off therefore the old Leaven – and keep the Feaſt with the unleavened Bread of Sincerity and Truth."

Nor does the ſtrict Obſervation of the moſt inferior Duties and Tranſgreſſions make Religion ſo difficult and perplexing a Taſk, as ſome may, from what has been

(*) It is for this Reaſon, that the Editor, in this Work, immediately after the Diſcourſe on Sincerity, added That of Integrity. See Vol. xvii. Page 134, 179. Serm. CCCLV.

been ſaid, be apt to imagine. So far from it, that (how ſtrange ſoever it may ſound at firſt hearing) a complete Obedience is more eaſy than a partial One; and it is leſs Trouble to be ENTIRELY, than ALMOST a Chriſtian.

Were the Duties indeed ſo numerous, confuſed, and independent of one another, as to cauſe a Maze and Diſtraction of Thought, or to entangle or overburthen our Memories, there might THEN be ſome Reaſon for ſuch an Objection. But ſince the Caſe is quite otherwiſe, ſince the Virtues and Vices are ranged under their diſtinct Heads, plain and eaſy both to be apprehended & remembered; ſince Conſcience and common Reaſon are always ſo ready to admoniſh and inform us, that we cannot, without ſome Force upon ourſelves, reject their Inſtructions; ſince the Virtues, great and ſmall, naturally aſſiſt each other; and to cleanſe our Conſciences from all the Relics of Guilt contributes as much to the Health of the Soul, as to diſcharge the Dregs and Remains of a Diſtemper does to That of the Body; it follows that there is nothing but Comfort, and Peace, and Joy, in an entire Obedience; and nothing but perpetual Struggle, Vexation, and Inquietude in a maimed or incomplete One. The Virtues being united, will mutually facilitate the Practice of each other: whatever Impreſſion is made on any Part, the

the whole Chain, ſo exquiſitely wrought, will be affected by it, and tremble throughout at the ſmalleſt Touch offered to the ſmalleſt Link of it.

Above all things, therefore, let us fix in our Hearts that important Principle of Virtue, in general, as before mentioned, upon which the whole Streſs and Weight of our Obedience muſt ever depend. This paſſes through the very Center of it; upon This, as the Globe upon its Axis, the whole Sphere of Duty is to turn; and all the Circles, great and little, will be carried round in the ſame Time, and by the ſame common Motion. Thus will our Religion be uniform, our Way plain and ſmooth before us, and we ſhall perceive, to our inexpreſſible Comfort, that the True Way to acquire the moſt real Good, is to "abſtain from all Appearance of Evil."

Sermon

SERMON CCCLVI.

On improving Time.

Isaiah lv. 6. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be "found: call ye upon him, while he is near."

Very few Persons are good Œconomists of their Fortune, and still fewer of their Time; and yet, of the Two, the latter is the most precious: It is of so great Importance to Mankind, that it cannot too often employ religious Meditation, there being nothing in the Management of which, Wisdom is more requisite, or where Mankind display their Inconsistency more.

Young People, especially, are apt to think they have so much Time before them, that they may squander what they please of it, and yet have enough left; as very great Fortunes have frequently seduced People to a ruinous Profusion – Fatal Mistakes! always repented of, but always too late.

We all of us complain of the Shortness of Time; and yet have more than we know what to do with. Our Hours are spent in doing nothing at all, or in doing nothing to the Purpose, (i.e) what we ought to do.

We

We are always complaining that our Days are but few: and yet act as tho there would be no End to them. Thus, altho our whole Life is always allowed by every One to be short, yet the several Divisions of it appear long and tedious. — We are for lengthening our Span in general, but would fain contract the Parts of which it is composed; of these we are careless, and throw them away with thoughtless Profusion. But, when collected into some of its great Portions, and viewed as the Measure of our Continuance in Life, we become sensible of its Value, and begin to regard it with a serious Eye. While Day after Day is wasted in a Course of Idleness or vicious Pursuits, if some Incident shall occur, which leads the most inconsiderate Man to think of his Age, or Time of Life; how much of it is gone, at what Period of it he is now arrived, and to what Proportion of it he can with any Probability look forward, as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some secret Compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his State. Happy if That virtuous Impression were not of momentary Continuance, but retained its Influence amidst the succeeding Cares and Pleasures of the World. — But alas!

Tho we are daily engaged in Courses, which our Consciences cannot but condemn; yet it is a serious thing to reflect how apt we are to postpone our Re-

formation: (†) Not that we mean to perſevere in them finally, but one Time or other to forſake them; in the mean while deceiving ourſelves, with Felix, that there is yet a more convenient Seaſon. (‡) There

(*) *Ut Non longa quibus mentitur Amica, Dieſque*
Longa videtur Opus debentibus, ut piger Annus
Pupillis, quos dura premit Cuſtodia Matrum;
Sic mihi tarda fluunt ingrataque Tempora, quæ Spes
Conſiliumque morantur agendi gnaviter id, quod
Æquè Pauperibus prodeſt, Locupletibus æquè,
Æquè neglectum Pueris Senibuſque nocebit.
Long as to him, who works for Debt, the Day,
Long as the Night to her, whoſe Love's away,
Long as the Year's dull Circle ſeems to run,
When the brisk Minor pants for Twenty one:
So ſlow th' unprofitable Moments roll,
That lock up all the Functions of my Soul:
That keep me from myſelf, and ſtill delay
Life's inſtant Buſineſs to a future Day:
That Truſt, which as we follow, or deſpiſe,
The Eldeſt is a Fool, the Youngeſt wiſe;
Which done, the Pooreſt can no Wants endure;
And which not done, the Richeſt muſt be poor.
At Thirty Man ſuſpects himſelf a Fool,
Knows, at Forty, and reforms his Plan,
At Fifty chides his infamous Delay:
Reſolves, and re-reſolves; then dies the ſame.

(†) *Cras te victurum, Cras dicis, Poſthume, ſæpe.*
Die mihi Cras illud, Poſthume, quandò venit?
Cras vives? Hodie jàm vivere, Poſthume, ſerum eſt.
Ille ſapit quiſquis, Poſthume, vixit Heri.

Five

There is scarce a thinking Man in the World, who is involved in the Business of it, but lives under a secret Impatience of the Hurry and Fatigue he suffers, and has formed a Resolution to fix himself, one Time or other, in such a State as is suitable to the End of his Being: but since the Duration of Life is so uncertain, how is it possible that we should defer a Moment the beginning to live according to the Rules of Reason?

The Man of Business has ever some one Point to carry, and then tells himself he will bid Adieu to all the Vanity of Ambition; the Man of Pleasure resolves to take his Leave at last, and part civilly; but the ambitious Man is entangled every Moment in a fresh Pursuit, and the Lover sees new Charmes in the Object he fancied he would abandon. It is therefore a fantastical Way of thinking, when we promise ourselves an Alteration in our Conduct from Change of Place or Difference of Circumstances, the same Passions will attend us wherever we are, until they are conquered. Ef-

Vive, memor Lethi—Fugit Hora—Hic flamma brevis—Spatium mercedi incohare longam, jam te premit Nox, &c. Quod adest memento sibi, Sero in Fundo Parsimonia. Repentance comes too late when all is spent.

Some Persons are so much for Enjoyment in the *present* Tense, that they cannot think of being thrifty, but in *Future*; and by continually procrastinating and putting off necessary Duties, never think seriously upon Matters, till they have no Time to perform them.

Serm. CCCLVI.

Effectually to deter us from this deceitful Procraſtination, is the Intent of the Words before us: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while He is near;" intimating hereby, that we may defer our Repentance ſo long, till it be too late to fly unto the Lord for Pardon. "Though the Lord is long-ſuffering, and of great Goodneſs," yet he will not intreat forever: if we weary him, he will forſake us; and, in the End, "ſhut-up his Loving-kindneſs in Diſpleaſure" — Indeed!

According to the Progreſs which we have made in the Journey of Life, the Field, which paſt Years preſent to our Review, is to each of us more or leſs extenſive, in this Reſpect. But to every One they will be found to afford ſufficient Matter of Humiliation and Regret.

For where is the Perſon, who, having acted for any Time in the World, remembers not many Errors, and Follies in his paſt Behaviour? Who dares to ſay, that he has improved, as he might have done, the various Advantages that were afforded him; and that he recalls nothing for which he has Reaſon either to grieve, or bluſh, and that he is wholly pure from Sin?

When we recollect the ſeveral Stages of Life thro which we have paſſed, the ſucceſſive Occupations in which we have been engaged, the Deſigns we have formed, and the Hopes and Fears which alternately have filled

filled our Breaſt; how barren, for the moſt Part, is the Remembrance, and how few Traces of any thing valuable, or important remain? — Like Characters drawn on the Sand, which the next Wave waſhes totally away; ſo one trivial Succeſſion of Events has effaced the Memory of the preceding; and tho we have ſeemed all along to be buſy, yet for much of what we have acted, we are neither wiſer nor better than if ſuch Actions had never been. — Hence,

Let the Retroſpect of what is paſt produce, as its firſt Effect, Humiliation in our own Eyes, and Abaſement before God. (*)

Much do human Pride and Self-complacency require ſome Correction; and That Correction is never more effectually adminiſtred, than by an impartial and ſerious Review of former Life. — But, Tho

(*) When we reflect on our former Tranſgreſſions, that we have provoked the Author of our Being, on whoſe Pleaſure all our Happineſs depends, to whoſe Bounty we owe thoſe very Faculties by the Abuſe of which we have offended him, what Shame and Indignation muſt it raiſe in our Breaſts, what Zeal to retrieve the Miſcarriage, and, by the moſt ſincere Application to Duty, to atone for our paſt Ingratitude? And when we recollect the infinite Danger to which we have been expoſed, that we have perhaps for many Years walked upon the Edge of a Precipice, while nothing but the ſlender Thread of a human Life has held us up from ſinking into endleſs Miſery; with what trembling Eagerneſs ſhould we ſeize the important Preſent, and labour to reſcue ourſelves from this State of Terror!

Tho paſt Time is gone, we are not to conſider it as irredeemably loſt. To a very profitable Purpoſe it may yet be applied, if we lay hold of it while it remains in Remembrance, and oblidge it to contribute to future Improvement. (*)

If you have gained nothing more by the Years that are paſt, you have at leaſt gained Experience; and Experience is the Mother of Wiſdom. You have ſeen the weak Parts of your Character; and may have diſcovered the chief Sources of your Miſconduct. To theſe let your Attention be directed; on theſe let the proper Guards be ſet.

If we have trifled long, let us reſolve to trifle no longer. If our Paſſions have often betrayed us, let us ſtudy how to keep them, in future, under better Diſcipline, and learn from thence not to truſt preſumptuouſly to our own Wiſdom; but humbly apply to the Author of our Being, and beſeech his Grace to guide us ſafely thro thoſe ſlippery and dangerous Paths, in which Experience has ſhown that we ſo readily err, and ſo eaſily fall.

It is a remarkable Peculiarity in the Retroſpect of former Life, that it is commonly attended with ſome Meaſure

(*) *Nunquàm ità quiſquam bene ſubducta Ratione ad Vitam ſuam, quin Res, Ætas, Uſus, ſemper aliquid apparet Novi, aliquid monet; ut illa, quæ te ſcire credas, paſciàs, et quæ tibi futuris prima, in experiendo, ut repudies. Sera venit Uſus ab Annis.*

Meaſure of Heavineſs of Heart. Even to the moſt Proſperous, the Memory of Joys that are paſt is accompanied with ſecret Sorrow. In the Days of former Years, many Objects ariſe to View, which make the moſt Unthinking, grave; and render the Serious, ſad. The pleaſurable Scenes of Youth, the Objects on which our Affections had been early placed, the Companions and Friends with whom we had ſpent many happy Days, even the Places and the Occupations to which we had been long accuſtomed, but to which we have now bid an eternal Farewell, can hardly ever be recalled without ſoftening, nor ſometimes, without piercing, the Heart.

Such Senſations, to which few, if any, are wholly Strangers, afford a ſtrong Proof of that Vanity of the human State, which is ſo often repreſented in the ſacred Writings. And Vain, indeed, muſt that State be, where Shades of Grief tinge the Recollection of its brighteſt Scenes.

But, at the ſame Time, tho it be very proper that ſuch Meditations ſhould ſometimes enter the Mind; yet, it is not adviſable for the gentle and tender Heart to dwell too long on them. They are apt to produce a fruitleſs Melancholy; to deject, without bringing much Improvement; to thicken the Gloom which already hangs over human Life, without furniſhing

proportionable Support and Aſſiſtance of Virtue.

It is adviſable, therefore, rather to recall to View ſuch Parts of former Conduct, if any ſuch there be, as afford in the Remembrance a rational Sattsfaction, as a Guide for us whereby to ſteer our future Actions. What Parts of Conduct are theſe? Are they the Purſuits of ſenſual Pleaſure, the Riots of Jollity, or the Diſplays of Show and Vanity? No; I appeal to your Hearts, if what you recollect with moſt Pleaſure be not the innocent, the virtuous, the honourable Parts of paſt Life; when you were employed in cultivating your Minds, and improving them with uſeful Knowledge; when by regular Application and perſevering Labour, you were laying the Foundation of future Reputation and Advancement; when you were occupied in diſcharging with Fidelity the Duties of your Station, and acquiring the Eſteem of the Worthy and the Good; when in ſome trying Situation you were enabled to act your Part with Firmneſs and Honour; or had ſeized the happy Opportunity of aſſiſting the Deſerving, of relieving the Diſtreſſed, and bringing down upon your Heads "the Bleſſings of thoſe that were ready to periſh."

Theſe, theſe are the Parts of former Life which are recalled with moſt Satisfaction! On them alone, no Heavineſs of Heart attends. You enjoy them as a

Treaſure

Treaſure now ſtored up, and put beyond all Danger of being loſt.(*) Theſe chear the Hours of Sadneſs, lighten the Burden of Old-age, and, thro the mortifying Remembrance of much of the paſt, dart a Ray of Light and Joy.

From the Review of theſe, and the Compariſon of them with the deceitful Pleaſures of Sin, let us learn, how to form our Eſtimate of Happineſs. Let us learn what is true, what is falſe, in human Pleaſures; and from Experience of the paſt, judge how we muſt in future turn, if we would lay a Foundation for permanent Satisfaction.

This is the Uſe which the Conſideration of our paſt Life, and the Particulars of it, ſhould have for the Improvement of the preſent. Here lies the immediate and principal Object of our Concern. For the Recollection of the paſt is only as far of Moment, as it acts upon the preſent. The Paſt to us now, is little; the Future, as yet, is nothing. Between theſe two great Gulphs of Time ſubſiſts the preſent, as a Path over which we are all paſſing. With haſty and inconſiderate Steps, therefore, let us not paſs it; but remember well, how much depends upon our holding a ſteady and

(*) *Extrà Fortunam eſt quicquid donatur Amicis,*
Quæ dederis ſolas ſemper habebis Opes.
Serm. CCCLVI.

and properly conducted Courſe. "Whatſoever thine Hand, therefore, findeth to do, do it now with all thy Might; for behold, now is the accepted Time; now is the Day of Salvation."

Many Directions might be given for the wiſe and religious Improvement of the Preſent, a few of which only I ſhall here obſerve.

Let us begin with excluding thoſe ſuperfluous Avocations which unprofitably conſume it. (*) Life is ſhort, and much that is of real Importance remains to be done. If we ſuffer the preſent Time to be waſted either in abſolute Idleneſs, or in frivolous Employments, it will hereafter call for Vengeance againſt us. Removing, therefore, what is utterly ſuperfluous, let us bethink ourſelves of what is moſt material to be attended to at preſent: — As firſt and chief,

The great Work of our Salvation; the Diſcharge of the religious Duties which we owe to God and our Creator, and to Chriſt our Redeemer. "God waiteth as yet to be gracious;" whether he will wait longer, none of us can tell. (‡) "To-day, therefore, if ye will hear

(*) See theſe particularly ſpoken to, Vol. xiii. Page 271.

(‡) It is an Inſtance of Mercy which demands the utmoſt Returns of the Sinner, that the Divine Compaſſion hath hitherto ſpared him, and not cut him off in the midſt of his Iniquity; that He has ſpared

hear his Voice, harden not your Hearts; "To-day, whilſt it is called To-day." — But alaſs!

To-morrow is ſtill the fatal Time when all is to be rectified; To-morrow comes — it goes — and we ſtill pleaſe ourſelves with the deluſive Shadow, whilſt we loſe the Reality; unmindful that the preſent Time alone is ours, and that the Future is yet unborn. (*)

Time is what we want moſt; but is withal what we uſe worſt; and for which we muſt all account, when Time ſhall be no more. If

ſpared him one Day more to provide for his Salvation, and flee from the Wrath to come.

But his Gratitude muſt be under ſtill further Obligations, when he reflects on the various Means of Grace that are offered to him; the clear Light and Direction to Duty which he enjoys; the noble Encouragements propoſed to his Obedience; the many Calls of God by his Word, by his Miniſters, and by the ſecret Whiſpers of his Spirit, to cloſe with theſe Overtures and be ſaved.

How ſore a Burden muſt it add to our Account, if we are unprofitable under ſo many Applications?

(*) *Senſim ſine Senſu Ætas ſeneſcit. Ætas nuſquàm non deſinit, ſivè dormias, ſivè vigiles. Horæ cedunt, Dies, Menſes, Anni, nec præteritum Tempus unquàm revertitur; nec quod ſequatur ſcire poteſt.*

The greateſt Loſs of Time is Delay and Expectation, which depends upon the Future. We let go the Preſent, which we have in our Power, and look forward to That which depends upon Chance; and ſo quit a Certainty for an Uncertainty. *Occaſionem cognoſce.*

Fronte capillata eſt, poſt eſt Occaſio calva.

Delays often ruin the beſt Deſigns: It is the *Remora* of all good Succeſs. *Cum Ferrum Ignè candet, tundendum eſt.* Serm. 356

If this State of ours was a State of pure Speculation, and we had nothing to do, we might then, with the Sluggard, well be allowed "all the day long to ſit folding our Hands." — But,

As it is not, and we have a Courſe to run, beſet with Dangers on every Side; are in a State of continual Warfare, and uncertain of the Time of our Continuance; — Who that would be happy can ſay that he hath a Moment to ſpare!

Every Opportunity, therefore, is to be embraced, wherein we can improve, reform, and amend; for, the longer we delay, the more Time we ſhall want, but have really leſs. (*)

In a Caſe, then, ſo momentous, Deliberation and Delay muſt be Folly. Pure Faith admits of no Delays. God indeed may, perchance, be found at what Time we ſhall pleaſe to "call upon him;" but, if He ſo ſeldom depart from the ordinary Means of his Grace for the Sake of thoſe who conſtantly wait upon him, why ſhould we preſume to think that He will at all Times

(*) It is the Complaint both of Fools and Philoſophers, that "Life is ſhort;" as if the Time we have, were not ſufficient for our Duties: but it is with our Lives, as with our Eſtates; a good Huſband will make a Little go a great Way: Whereas, let the Revenues of a Prince fall into the Hands of a Prodigal, and it is ſoon conſumed. So that the Time allotted us, if it were well employed, were abundantly ſufficient to anſwer all the Ends and Purpoſes of Mankind.

Times be attentive to the Pleaſure of Man; and that after God hath fixed him an allotted Time for his Work, it ſhould be lawful for us to alter the Determinations of His Counſel, and affix to ourſelves a more convenient Seaſon?

"Believe me, It is not the Part of a wiſe Man to ſay, To-morrow, and I will live better: To-morrow's Life may be too late; therefore, live as thou oughteſt To-day; for, Time, which eats as a Canker, eats all things, removes every thing from its Poſſeſſions, and ſuffers nothing to continue." (*) We ourſelves, and all things around

(*) *Non eſt (credo mihi) Sapientis, dicere, Vivam. Sera nimis Vita eſt crastina, Vive Hodiè. Omnia Tempus edax depaſcitur, omnia carpit, Omnia Sede movet, nec ſinit eſſe diù. Tempus edax Rerum, Cuncta Pede præterit Ætas. Omnia Falce metit Tempus. Ipſa quoquè aſſiduo labuntur Tempora Motu, Non ſecùs ac Flumen: neque enim conſiſtere Flumen Nec levis Hora poteſt: at Unda impellitur Undâ, Urgeturque priore veniente, urgetque priorem: Tempora ſic fugiunt pariter, pariterque ſequuntur, Et nova ſunt ſemper, nam quod fuit antè, relictum eſt, Fitque quod haud fuerat, Momentaque cuncta novantur.* Ut Unda Undam perpetuo propellit; ità Dies Diem trudit; nova pergunt interire Lunæ. We are not, therefore, to manage as if we had a thouſand Years to throw away—Death ſtands at the Door, and may be the Event of every doubtful Moment. Let us make the moſt of our Minute, therefore, and be good for ſomething whilſt we may.

around us are unſteady; therefore, do thy utmoſt for the

may. *Ut Viatori, ſivè ceſſanti, ſivè acceleranti, Sol Curſum ſuum non retardat: ità, ſivè dormias, ſivè vigiles, nunquàm non deſuit Ætas.*

Jàm magis atque magis præceps agit omnia Fatum.

Time, once miſſed, is not eaſily to be recalled; and ſo ſwift, that no One can overtake it: *Fronte capillata eſt, poſt eſt Occaſio calva.*

Sic ſemèl amiſſum volat irrevocabile Tempus.

——— ——— ——— *Spatio brevi*
Spem longam reſeces: dùm loquimur fugerit invida
Ætas: Carpe Diem, quàm minimum credula poſtero.
——— ——— *Feſtinat enim decurrere velox*
Floſculus anguſtæ, miſeræque brevisſima Vitæ
Portio: dùm bibimus, dùm Serta, Unguenta, Puellas,
Poſcimus, obrepit non intellecta Senectus;
Tempora labuntur, tacitisque ſeneſcimus Annis.

There is no greater Evidence that a Man doth not really intend to do a thing, than his putting it off, when it might be done at the preſent Time. It is like giving good Words and making fair Promiſes to an importunate Creditor, & appointing him another Time, when we know in our Conſciences that we intend not to pay, and perhaps ſhall be leſs able to do it *Then* than *Now*. See No. 374. of the Spectator.

Procraſtination in every Age has been the Ruin of a great Part of Mankind; dwelling amidſt endleſs Proſpects of what they are to do hereafter, they cannot ſo properly be ſaid to live, as to be always about to live, and the Future has ever been the Gulph in which the Preſent is ſwallowed up and loſt. Hence ariſe many of thoſe Evils which befal Men in their worldly Concerns; what might at preſent be arranged with Advantage, being delayed cannot be arranged at all. To-morrow being loaded with the Concerns of To-day, in Addition to its own, is clogged and embarraſſed: thus, Affairs which

have

the preſent." (*) — It is the greateſt Folly to play in the

have been poſtponed, multiply and crowd upon one another, till at laſt they prove ſo intricate, and the Preſſure of Buſineſs becomes ſo great, that nothing is done properly. Evils of the ſame Kind, and ariſing from ſimilar Cauſes, overtake Men in their moral and ſpiritual Intereſts; there are very few, but who are ſenſible of ſome things in their Character and Conduct, which ought to be corrected, and which at one Time or other they intend to correct, ſome headſtrong Paſſion which they deſign to ſubdue, ſome bad Habit which they purpoſe to reform, and ſome improper Connexion which they are reſolved to break off; but the convenient Seaſon for their Reformation is not yet come, certain Obſtacles are in the Way, which they expect ſome Time or other to ſurmount, and therefore they go on in their preſent Courſes, truſting to a future Day to begin their deſigned Amendment; in the mean Time the Angel of Death deſcends, and in the midſt of their diſtant Plans executes his Commiſſion, and they ceaſe to be. O guard againſt Deluſions of this Kind, which have been fatal to ſo many; correct immediately what is wrong, for who can tell how long you ſhall live and enjoy your preſent Advantages.

(*) By deferring to live well To-day, we ſhall be the leſs prepared to do ſo To-morrow; (*Qui non eſt Hodiè, Cras minùs aptus erit*) for the Man that poſtpones Amendment to Hereafter, it is not that he intends to do it Then, but becauſe he hath no Mind to do it Now. *Carpe Diem—Utendum eſt Ætate—Memor eſto brevis Ævi—Eripe te Moræ—Sapientes numerant Horas—Spem Pretio non emo—Fronte capillata eſt, poſt eſt Occaſio calva*; Theſe are great Excitements to Induſtry and Diligence to improve in Virtue and Goodneſs; and teach us to let ſlip no Opportunity or Time, (which often ſeems to be put into our Hands by good Providence) of ſerving God, and

the Time of Danger, and to ſeek Death FIRST in the Errors of our Life; and THEN when ſinking, to look faintly back, and wiſh to have "trod in the Paths of Life."

The longer we delay, the greater will our Danger be; for, "by Delays, Grace decays, and Sin and Weakneſs abound." (*)

The longer we keep ourſelves back from That which is good, the greater will our Reluctance be when we would return to it, and our Weakneſs with it; for evil Habits are not eaſily forſaken: Though it be not abſolutly impoſſible, yet, certainly, it muſt be very difficult, after ſuch a Procedure, to "renew ourſelves again by Repentance," if not dangerous; and that, therefore, having a preſent and convenient Seaſon, it is the Height of Folly and Madneſs to defer it to a future Op-

doing Good; for that the Sun will not ſtand ſtill for us, as it did for Joſhua in Gibeon, nor ſlacken its Courſe for us, upon our little Occaſions of Ambition, Preferment, Learning or Livelihood.

(*) In neceſſary Matters which muſt be done, there no greater Argument of a weak and impotent Mind than Irreſolution, to be undetermined where the Caſe is ſo plain, and to be always about doing That which we are convinced muſt be done. The Salvation of the Soul is invaluable, Life is uncertain, and as the preſent Time is all that we can call our own, let us not put off the Concerns of our immortal Intereſt for a Moment, leſt we ſhould be permitted to die in our Sins, as a juſt Puniſhment for trifling with God and our own Conſcience.

Opportunity, to which probably we may never arrive; but, if we ſhould, our Delays and Sins will have ſo deadened us to all Goodneſs and Reformation, that it will be more than an equal Chance againſt us, that we ſhall THEN be equally unwilling, and more unable to engage herein, ſo as to perform rightly the arduous Taſk; for, what is the Difference of any Time that is future from that which is now preſent? barely that it is uncertain, and that, if it ever happens, ſo much more of Life is over, without beginning the Work — two very unlucky Circumſtances to make it preferable to the preſent!

It is moſt evident, that there muſt be a Beginning to reform, which the longer it is deferred, the Work will be increaſed, the Inclination to ſet about it, and the Ability to perform it, be diminiſhed. Is it reaſonable to imagine that the Difficulty of To-day will be decreaſed To-morrow? Will Cuſtom, that adds Strength to all things, diminiſh the Force of Inclination and Paſſion? and will delaying to attempt our Reformation, make it more eaſy for us to reform? Will the Burthen, which we now think too heavy to bear, become tolerable by adding to its Weight? ſurely not: We ſhall be equally, if not more unfit hereafter than now; and we ſhall have the ſame, if not greater Dif-

ficulties to encounter. (*) Similar, (if not worse) in every Circumſtance, will our Caſe be then, as at this Inſtant;

(*) ——— *Petite Hinc, Juvenesque Senesque,*
Finem Animo certum, miſerisque Viatica Canis.
Cras & Cras inquit—Cras fit—Quid? quaſi magnum
Nempe Diem donas? Sed dum Lux alterq; venit,
Jam Cras bis centum cenſumque abiere Kalendæ;
Egerit hos Annos, & ſemper paulum erit ultrà.
Nim quamvis prope ſit, quamvis Proximus ipſe,
Fortunam ipſe ſuam ſtultâ ſibi fallitur Arte.

Perſ. "From thee both Old and Young, with Profit learn
The Bounds of Good and Evil to diſcern.
Coran. Unhappy he who ſees this Work adjourn,
And To-morrow would the Senſe Delay;
His lazy Morrow will be like To-day.
Perſ. But is one Day of Life ſo much to borrow?
Coran. Yes, ſure; for Yeſterday was once To-morrow.
That Yeſterday is gone, and nothing gained;
And all thy fruitleſs Days will thus be drained;
For thou haſt now To-morrow yet to uſe,
And wilt be ever to begin thy Taſk;
Who, like the hindmoſt Chariot-Wheels, are curſt,
Still to be near, but ne'er to reach the firſt."

Thoſe who will not mend To-day, will have more Work To-morrow. He who cannot find in his Heart to amend, even while he is a Novice in Iniquity, will be leſs diſpoſed to it, when Time and Cuſtom have hardened him in it.

——— ——— ——— *Separemus.*
Incipe—Vivendi qui reſtè prævertat Horam,
Ruſticus expectat dum defluat Amnis; at ille
Labitur, & labetur in omne volubilis Ævum.

Repent To-day, To-morrow may be too late.

Instant; therefore, similar (if not greater) will be our dangerous Presumption for delaying this important Duty.

"Behold, therefore, Now is the accepted Time, Now is the Day of Salvation."

"Seek ye the Lord, then, while He may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;" For, what better Time can there be than the present? for now we are not at so great a Distance from the Lord, neither have our Sins separated between Him and us so widely, as in Time, perhaps, they may, if we now repent not, and turn unto him.

Hereafter our Task will increase, and our Abilities to perform it decrease. Sin is never at a Stand; if we retreat not, we must, of Necessity, advance; and it grows upon us daily, acquires Strength by Time, becomes valiant in our Weakness, and waxeth mighty in our Infirmities; till, at length, we become as "the corrupt Tree, which cannot bring-forth good Fruit;" and remain only to be "cut down, and be cast into the Fire."

"To resist the Beginnings of Sin, therefore, is Wisdom, and hastily to depart from Evil is Understanding;" for, whosoever continues in it, will, finally, be "hardened through the Deceitfulness of it; and then, "nothing will remain, but fiery Indignation to consume the incorrigible." — Besides,

The firſt Years of our Life are generally the beſt; the ſucceeding Ones bring their Buſineſs with them. If in the Strength and Fervour of Youth we find ourſelves unapt to perform this Buſineſs, can we hope to find ourſelves more inclined or more able to perform it in the Infirmities of our waſting Age; an Age whoſe Cares find it full Employment; in which we may have Trouble enough, even in ſupporting Life, without the additional Trouble of reforming it? Nor can we depend at all upon this ſcanty and ineffectual Opportunity; even upon a Suppoſition that Nature ſhould continue its Courſe, and that Providence ſhould not cut us off judicially from arriving at it!

He that builds upon the Uſe of any future Day, eſpecially of any diſtant One, muſt have entirely forgot that there are any Diſeaſes in Nature which may diſable his Body, any violent Shocks which may diſorder the Faculties of his Mind; has forgot that there are ſuch things as Fevers, and Palſies, and Apoplexies, in the World; has forgot that he has no Security for any Moment of his Life. — Of the Thouſands that died Yeſterday, why does he fancy that many were not flouriſhing in Youth and Strength like him; perhaps, like him too, reſolving to reform To-morrow? He muſt have forgot too, which ought moſt to be remembered, that it is by God's Favour only that he can be enabled

enabled to do To-morrow what he is unwilling to attempt To-day. And why ſhould he imagine that God, whoſe Aſſiſtance he has ſo often refuſed, when it was offered, may not in his Turn refuſe it too when it is wanted?

We do not allow ourſelves to determine what God will do in Caſes like this; but we think One inſpired by him makes him declare himſelf to this Purpoſe, "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed, I have ſtretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded, but ye have ſet at nought all my Counſel, and would none of my Reproof; I will alſo laugh at your Calamity, and mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as a Deſolation, and your Deſtruction as a Whirlwind. When Diſtreſs and Anguiſh cometh upon you, Then ſhall they call upon me, but I will not anſwer; they ſhall ſeek me early, but they ſhall not find me."

By ſuch Proceedings, Conſcience, the Monitor within us, will be ſilenced; till, at length, the Almighty will be baniſhed from our Thoughts, and his Fear from before our Eyes: The ſecret Aſſiſtances of divine Grace; the kind Admonitions of God, and the wholeſome Advice of Friends, will be in vain; the Wrath of the Almighty, and the ſeverеſt Threats of Religion, will be diveſted of their Terrors; and, according to the Apoſtle's Repreſentation, we ſhall be

like those "who (being past feeling) gave themselves up to work all Manner of Wickedness with Greediness."

So that, by deferring our Repentance and Amendment, we may in the End be debarred of Both; both in the just Judgment of God, and also in the Nature and Reason of the thing itself.

Vice, by Custom, may pass into Nature; and, by a continued Round in its Follies, we may afterwards incline to it as naturally as a Stone falleth to the Ground, or as a "Spark flieth upward;" (*) yea, and besides this, being thus prevented by Nature from a Return to our Duty, we may be further inclined to it also by the Will of God himself.

To an effectual Repentance, the Assistance of the divine Grace is absolutely necessary; and who can say, it will be imparted to those who have already, and do still abuse it?

It may be asked, then, By what Means may we be assured of being made Partakers thereof?

The Answer is plain: There is a Time, a Season, a Day, allotted to us all, and to every Man: and, "Behold, Now is the accepted Time, Now is the Day of Salvation;" "If therefore ye will hear his Voice, harden

(*) *Naturam expellas Furcâ, tamen usque recurret.* — Vice hath its certain Period, after which it becomes desperate and incurable.

den not your Hearts as in the Day of Temptation; and make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from Day to Day."

Should we neglect the preſent Seaſon, "the Night will come wherein no Man can work;" "when the things which belong to our Peace will be for ever hid from our Eyes." (*)

After this Day is ſpent, a Night of Darkneſs, "ſuch as may be felt," may perhaps ſucceed; when God will forſake thoſe who firſt forſook him, and "deliver them over to a reprobate Mind;" when, like Pharoah, they ſhall only ſurvive to be Objects of God's Diſpleaſure, or, as Occaſions to glorify his Power.

God, it is true, is ready to receive a ſincere Penitent into Favour always, and hath given us gracious Promiſes and Encouragements hereto; but, they are all conditional: We muſt repent, therefore, and reform our Lives, otherwiſe they belong not to us; and as it is uncertain whether we ſhall be able to repent hereafter, what

(*) *Labitur occulte, fallitque volatilis Ætas,*
Et nihil eſt Annis velocius. ———

Time is the Price of Eternity; it may be redeemed, but not bought: and we ſhould never put That off till To-morrow, which we may do To-day. Our preſent Time ought to be managed with a judicious Care, ſince we cannot be ſure of a Moment to come, nor recall the leaſt Part of one that is paſt. *Volat irrevocabile Tempus.*

As of all Poverty, That of the Mind is the moſt deplorable; ſo, of all Prodigality, That of Time is the worſt. Serm. 356

what Madneſs is it to defer this important Concern, on which our eternal Happineſs or Miſery depends!

Our Time is a Talent, which God hath intruſted us with, to the End that we ſhould render him a due and exact Account of it; — and, if we conſider the Buſineſs we have to do, more eſpecially in Compariſon of the Eternity, which is to follow, how ſhort is it? — For, what are three ſcore Years and ten, if compared with a Duration that will never end? — But then, how many are cut-off in the Flower of their Youth, and in the Prime of Life! — Beſides,

What Allowances muſt we make for Sleep, (*) for Re-

(*) *Tuor ut exſectum Curis, cumque gravatum*
Infelix babuit Lectus, gratiſque jacentem
Dulcis et alta Quies, placidaque ſimillima Morti
Allicunt Somnus Tempus, Motumque, Merumque.
Præter Somnum nihil ſanis Membris medetur,
—— Diffeſſa gravat ſuccumbunt Membra Laberi.

As to Reſt in Sleep, it is to be meaſured by the Rule of God's Ordinance, who gave us Sleep, to refreſh and ſupport our Minds and Bodies, when wearied with Toil and Labour, to repair the Decay, and to enable them the better to perform their religious Duties. (*Major poſt Otia Virtus.*) So that it muſt always be remembered, that this Gift of God, is for us to profit by it; and not to make us idle and inactive. Conſequently,

Tho it is not poſſible to deſcribe the limited Time for Sleep, it being to be proportioned to the different Conſtitutions of Men; yet let no Man fall into the Crime of Solomon's Sluggard; who after a

ſeaſonable

Refreſhments and Amuſements of Life; (*) I may add alſo for our Sins, which have no ſmall Share? and when all theſe are deducted, how little Portion, how few Moments of our Lives remain for the Service of God, and Proviſion for Eternity? — And,

As Time is ſhort, ſo is it uncertain: we are only Maſters of the preſent Moment, and cannot promiſe ourſelves a longer Duration; and, when once the preſent Time is paſt, it can never be recalled.

Sermon

ſeaſonable Refreſhment cries, "a little more Sleep, and a little more Slumber, a little more Folding of the Hands to Sleep."

Becauſe it draws into ſeveral other Sins, as Waſte of Time, filling the Body with divers Diſeaſes, and dulling the Faculties of the Soul, and ſo defeats the End of our Creation, which is to ſerve God in an active Obedience, or a conſtant Diſcharge of our Duty in that State of Life we are placed in by his Providence. And,

Beſides the Sinfulneſs of Sloth, it will cover a Man with Rags. Let a Man be in what State of Life ſoever, Poverty will overtake him, till he is deſtitute of convenient Cloathing. See Prov. xx. 13. and xxiii. 21. — Ου χρη πανυχον ανδρα βουλαφορον Αυδειν

Non oportet per totum Noctem dormire conſiliarium Virum.

Otia Corpus alunt, animus quoque paſcitur illis;

Surgamus, cantat. carpit utrumque labor.

Quamvis, crede, Deum tibi dilexiſſe ſupremum.

(*) 'Tis juſt ſo much Time loſt as is idly ſpent.

SERMON CCCLVII.

On the same Subject.

Perſuaſives to it.

Iſaiah lv. 6. "Seek ye the Lord, while he may be "found: call ye upon him, while he is near."

The great Importance of improving Time, and the chief Methods for it, are what we have already conſidered, and urged the Neceſſity of it from the Danger of Delay, and the Uncertainty of Life: — Theſe may, perhaps, be thought ſo trite and obvious Reflections, that none can want to be reminded of them; and indeed in the Affairs and Purſuits of this Life, it ſeems to be enough attended to. The Man intent on the World need not be perſuaded to make haſte to be rich, nor the Ambitious to ſeize the firſt Opportunity of advancing himſelf to Honour; and the great Maxim of the Libertine is, "let us eat and drink," and enjoy as much Pleaſure as we can To-day, "for To-morrow we die." And yet in the Purſuit of our immortal Intereſts, where it ought to have the greateſt Influence, this obvious indiſputable Truth is little regarded by us.

In

In this Reſpect "the Children of this World are wiſer in their Generation than the Children of Light:" admitting their Principles to be true, that the only Portion of Man is in this Life, they act wiſely; they keep their End, evil as it is, ſteadily in View; improve every Incident to the Promotion of it, and leave nothing to be done To-morrow, which may be executed To-day in Advancement of it. But how often ſhall we ſee Men, profeſſing themſelves Chriſtians, acknowledging the Doctrines, and valuing their Hopes in the Promiſes of the Goſpel, and yet with ſtrange Inconſiſtency putting off all Concerns for the Attainment of them? Every Intereſt or Pleaſure of Life, even the moſt trifling Amuſement, is ſuffered to poſtpone the One thing neceſſary. Some Time or other the Man reſolves to ſet about it, but it is ſoon enough yet. He cannot yet diſengage himſelf from his preſent Pleaſures; but in a few Years his Circumſtances of Life will be altered, and his Deſires be more eaſily governed, and then he will apply himſelf in earneſt to the Work of Penitence and Religion. But when this projected Time comes, ſome new Illuſions ariſe, which defer the intended Reformation a little longer.

Our later Vanities ſucceed into the ſame Power and Dominion over us that the former had, and the Anſwer to Religion continues ſtill the ſame: "Go thy

Way for this Time; and at a more convenient Season I will send for thee." But what Season can be so convenient as the present? How know we that a Day, that an Hour longer will be granted us? that our Souls shall not this Night be required from us, laden with those unpardoned Sins for which we proposed to repent even To-morrow? this is doubtless a Reflection which, if attended to, should strike Terror and Amazement into the secureſt Sinner; & engage him with Fear and Trembling to lay-hold on the present Moment, and not suffer it to pass without Improvement by him.

Even he who has the faireſt Prospect of Life before him, who rejoices in the Strength and Beauty of Youth, yet if he considers by how precarious a Tenure he holds these Advantages, that a thousand Accidents may before next Dawn lay all these Glories in the Dust, and, if this very possible Event should happen, he must immediately enter upon an eternal unalterable State of Happiness or Misery; that if he has made no Provision for this great Change, the Omission can never be repaired, the Time misspent never be redeemed; he is lost and undone for ever, and condemned to everlasting Anguish and Despair; can he stand against the Terror of so awakening a Reflection? Can he go calmly on, and leave so important, so irretrievable an Interest at so much Hazard and Uncertainty? When

so

ſo momentous a Concern is at Stake, and the near and certain Approach of Death ſets this Proſpect before us, it ſeldom fails of its Influence on us. With what Regret will the wounded Soul then look back on the Years it has waſted in Purſuits of Vanity? How will he wiſh to recal the precious Hours he has ſpent in Trifles, and loitered away in idle, unprofitable Diverſions?

To thoſe ſurely who have gone far and long in the Ways of Sin, we need only obſerve, that the Day is far ſpent, and the Night is at hand; that they have much Time to redeem; have already ſpent the faireſt Part of their Portion, and therefore are concerned with the utmoſt Solicitude to improve the ſmall Remainder.

It is ſomething peculiarly affecting to ſee gray Hairs, and the Infirmities of Age, ſquandering away the laſt Stage of Life in Sin and Folly, without Remorſe for the paſt, and thoughtleſs of the future.

With whatever Deluſions we may flatter our own Security, ſuch Examples are not looked on without Terror and Concern. And we doubt not but each Beholder reſolves to be wiſer for himſelf, long before That Age to abſtract from the World and reform, and not leave the whole Talk of the Day to be wrought out at the laſt Hour, at leaſt to devote That Period wholly to Religion, and to the Care of Eternity.

But alas! how few are prevailed upon to make the proper Inference from these Observations, to reflect that it is not only uncertain whether they shall arrive at that Period, but uncertain also whether they shall employ that Reserve better than others have done before them? that tho the Day of their natural Life may continue to that Time, yet their Day of Salvation may expire before: and from these just Apprehensions to conclude the Wisdom of attending to the present Calls of Grace, lest they be hardened thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin, and the slighted Mercy be with-drawn from them.

This very Night our Souls may be required of us; and then, where shall all our Prospects and Purposes of future Repentance and Amendment be?

Trust not, therefore, to the Morrow, for we know not what a Day, what an Hour may bring forth; (*) and "defer not till Death to be justified."

The

(*) There is no confident Dependance upon future Expectations, however promising: the most sanguine Hopes are often dashed in Pieces by the Intervention of some unforeseen and unexpected Accident. — Πολλὰ μεταξὺ πίπτει κάκ τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν τὸ πρᾶγμα.

Multa cadunt inter Calicem supremaque Labra.

Let not, therefore, the Work of To-day be put off till To-morrow. To-morrow is not ours; and tho' we should live to enjoy it, yet we must not overload it with a Burden not its own; "sufficient unto the Day will be the Duty of it."

The Work now may neither be impoſſible nor difficult; let us, then, ſeize with Reſolution the preſent Moment, and no longer depend on Futurity which we cannot command.

If it be certain that we muſt one Day give an Account of all our Actions; and if, from a View of our periſhable Nature, it is uncertain how ſoon we may be called upon to give it up; if an obſtinate Perſeverance in Sin may ſhorten our Days of Grace, and render us incapable of Repentance; then, how doth it become us to "give all Diligence to make our Calling and Election ſure," and "make no Tarrying to turn to the Lord; leſt the Wrath of the Lord come forth, and in our ſeeming Security we be ſuddenly deſtroyed!" — But further,

To this Conſideration of the Shortneſs and Uncertainty of our Time, let us further add the Greatneſs and Difficulty of the Work we have to perform in it.

It is generally obſerved, that whoever engages in a vicious Courſe is inſenſibly led on from one Degree of Wickedneſs to another; ſo that the further he advanceth in the Ways of Sin, the more difficult doth his Retreat grow.

There is great Reaſon, therefore, why Men ſhould be often cautioned againſt the Beginnings of Sin; or, if they have unhappily engaged themſelves in a bad and

vicious Courſe, that they ſpeedily break it off by Repentance, without Delay, "To-day, whilſt it is called To-day;" leſt by Degrees they become at laſt hardened in their Wickedneſs, and ſo finally periſh. (*)

To ſubdue the Luſts and Paſſions of our Corruption, to correct the evil Propenſities of our Nature, to poſſeſs the Soul with the Reverence and Love of God, to ſow and cultivate in it the Seeds of Grace, and improve them into ſettled Habits of Piety and Virtue; in ſhort, to prepare it to be a fit Inhabitant of that holy Place to which we aſpire, is a Work not to be accompliſhed in a Moment, but to be brought to Perfection by ſlow and gradual Advances, through ſeveral hard and laborious Stages of Diſcipline.

Various Mortifications muſt be undergone, many Difficulties conquered, and Obſtructions removed, many ſtrong Attacks of the Enemy withſtood, before we can arrive at a juſt Maturity in Religion, at the Firmneſs of an able and faithful Soldier of Chriſt.

A Work thus difficult can never be begun too ſoon; it

(*) Every Paſſion is more eaſily ſubdued before it has been long accuſtomed to the Poſſeſſion of the Heart; every Idea is obliterated with leſs Difficulty, as it has been more ſlightly impreſſed, and leſs frequently renewed. We ſhould, therefore, combat with our Paſſions betimes, ſo ſhall we be victorious.

Qui primos Vitiorum Sarculos eradicat, etiam cætera, quæ inde proveniunt, ſuſtulit. Multò præſtat cavere, quàm admittere.

Incertùm quæ Fata ferant, ubi ſiſtere detur.

it is the Buſineſs of our whole Life, and he who ſets earlieſt about it, will find his Time little enough for the finiſhing of it: but the longer it is deferred, the more difficult it becomes; he who begins late is not only obliged to learn to do well, form anew the whole Diſpoſition of his Soul, to acquire new Habits of Life, to practiſe Duties to which he is utterly a Stranger; but, which is a much harder Taſk than this, he muſt unlearn all his former Life; renounce Gratifications he has long been uſed to; diveſt himſelf of Habits which by Cuſtom have grown up to be a Part of his Conſtitution, and are become a Kind of ſecond Nature to him; contend with an Enemy that has long ſubdued him; reſiſt the ſtrongeſt Temptations from the Violence of his own Deſires, the Importunity and Reproaches of his old Companions in Sin, and, which perhaps is not the leaſt mortifying Part of his Diſcipline, he muſt humble himſelf to an Acknowledgment of his own Folly.

And when we conſider that all this is to be performed under the Pangs and Remorſe of a wounded Conſcience, and a continual Dread leſt the evil Day overtake him before he has finiſhed his Work and made his Peace with God, how great muſt the Labour, how ſevere the Conflict be?

Since then the Burden of the Work increaſes with

the Delay; with what Perſuaſion ſhould this Argument recommend to us the immediate Diſpatch of it?

The Queſtion of Nicodemus, "Can a Man be born when he is Old?" may not improperly be aſked even in that ſpiritual Senſe meant by our Saviour. Thro' the Grace of God this is not impoſſible: But when we reflect how unfit we are for any weighty Performance in that unactive Part of our Life, how often the Faculties of the Mind are as much decayed as thoſe of the Body, how many Imperfections will attend even the beſt we can do, the Diffidence we muſt be under whether God will accept our defective Services, whether he will regard our Sacrifice when we have nothing to offer him but the Dregs and Refuſe of Life, the Days of Loathing and Satiety, and the Years in which we have no Pleaſure; what amazing Folly is it to defer the great Buſineſs of Life to a Time the leaſt qualified for a due Performance of it?

Each of theſe Arguments, One would think, were ſufficient to recommend to us the wiſe Advice in the Text; but when they are collected together, and ſet before us in one View; when we conſider how ſhort and precarious our Time is, the Difficulty of the Work to be accompliſhed; that every Day both adds to the Difficulty of the Service, and takes away from our Strength to perform it; how uncertain it is whether the

Years

Years we propose to ourselves shall be indulged us; uncertain whether we shall have Power or even Inclination to improve them better than those we now squander away; and uncertain whether God will accept so maimed and defective an Offering; and lastly, that the Matter we leave to the Hazard of so many & great Uncertainties, is nothing less than our eternal Salvation; when these important Considerations are brought together, and set before a rational Being intent on Happiness, and acknowledging the Truth of these Articles, could it be imagined that a bare single Possibility should be of Weight sufficient to over-balance them all?

And yet thus it is; This is the whole Strength of the Sinner's Confidence; it is possible he may live to be old; it is possible the Grace of God may then enable him to redeem the Years he has lost, and receive him to Mercy: but how much more possible is it that all these Schemes may miscarry, and how dreadful will the Event be if they should do so?

What then I would inculcate from the Whole, and what I have inculcated throughout, is, that without Delay, we put ourselves sincerely to the Practice of every Virtue, which, by any Means, we shall discern to be our Duty; and that the further we have hitherto gone in the Ways of Sin and Wickedness, that we redouble

our Diligence to recal and renew it, and ſeize every Opportunity to improve the ſame.

We are hitherto preſerved by the good Providence of God to conſider and amend our Ways; the Day of Grace is as yet vouchſafed to us, though many of thoſe with whom we have converſed, are now "laid in the loweſt Pit, in the Place of Darkneſs, and in the Deep." Their Sentence is fixed forever; for "there is no Work, nor Device, nor Knowledge, nor Wiſdom, nor Repentance, nor Mercy in the Grave whither they are gone: their Love alſo, and their Hatred, and their Envy is now periſhed; neither have they any more a Portion forever in any thing that is done under the Sun." And,

Of thoſe who have miſpent their Time whilſt here on Earth, what would they now give for a little Portion of it to redeem their former Miſcarriages, and make their Peace with God. Let their Folly, therefore, dictate to us the Wiſdom of a better Conduct.

How long any of us may ſurvive, we know not; but, this we know, that we muſt fall at laſt, and that the Time we have to live, whether long or ſhort, is as nothing with Reſpect to that Eternity which is to come; and for which therefore we ſhould be conſtantly preparing, leſt Day ſucceeding Day, and Year ſucceeding Year, Death at laſt overtake us in the ſame ſlothful State,

State, reſolving to repent, without beginning; or beginning, without finally well-finiſhing.

He who has lived with the greateſt Care, will find upon a Review of his Time that he hath ſomething to amend; but he who hath miſpent much, has ſtill a greater Concern upon him: hard is the Taſk he has to perform, and ſhort is the Time in which it muſt be performed; indeed, the greater the Work, the ſhorter the Time; and therefore with the greater Diligence he ſhould apply himſelf to the Improvement of it.

In a Word: He who has waſted much of his Stock, is concerned attentively to improve the little that is left; and he who has been moſt frugal, need not be at a Loſs for the Employment of it all.

The Hazards of deferring Repentance, we ſee, are many and great; the preſent therefore is our Time, and none other can we depend on. Let us therefore inſtantly begin our Reformation, and finally perſevere in the ſame; that at what Time our Lord ſhall come, we may be ready; that where he is, there we may be alſo.

Let us frequently make the preſent Employment of our Time an Object of Thought, and aſk ourſelves — About what we are now buſied? What is the ultimate Scope of our preſent Purſuits? Can we juſtify them to ourſelves? Are they likely to produce any thing that will ſurvive the preſent Moment, and bring forth ſome Fruit for Futurity? (Serm. 367) He

He who can give no ſatisfactory Anſwer to ſuch Queſtions as theſe, has Reaſon to ſuſpect that his Employment is not tending to his Advantage or Honour.

What I have already ſaid, reſpects ſpiritual Improvement only: Not that even temporal Opportunities are to be diſregarded, or their due Adjuſtments: for he who every Morning plans the Tranſactions of the Day, and follows that Plan, carries on a Thread that will guide him thro the Labyrinth of a buſy Life. The orderly Arrangement of his Time is like a Ray of Light, which darts itſelf thro all his Affairs.

Diſpatch is the Soul of Buſineſs, and nothing contributes more to Dipatch, than Method. Lay down a Method, therefore, for every thing, and adhere to it inviolably, as far as unexpected Incidents may allow.

But, where no Plan is laid, where the Diſpoſal of Time is ſurrendered merely to the Chance of Incidents, all things lie confuſed in one Chaos, which admits neither of Diſtribution nor Review.

The firſt Requiſite, therefore, of introducing Order into the Management of Time, is, to be impreſſed with a juſt Senſe of its Value. Let us conſider how much depends upon it, and how faſt it flies away.

The Bulk of Men are in nothing more capricious and inconſiſtent than in their Appreciation of Time. When they think of it as the Meaſure of their Continu-

ance

ance on Earth, they highly prize it, and, with the greatest Anxiety, ſeek to lengthen it out; but, when they view it in ſeparate Parcels, they appear to hold it in Contempt, and ſquander it away with inconſiderate Profuſion.

While they complain that Life is ſhort, they are often wiſhing its different Periods at an End. Covetous of every other Poſſeſſion, of Time only they are prodigal. (*) They allow every Man to be Maſter of this Property, and make every frivolous Occupation welcome that can help them to conſume it. (‡)

Among thoſe who are ſo careleſs of Time, it is not to be expected that Order ſhould be obſerved in its Diſtribution; but, by this fatal Neglect, how many Materials of ſevere and laſting Regret are they laying-up in Store for themſelves! The Time which they ſuffer to

(*) See the ſecond Paragraph of No. 93, of the Spectator.

(‡) Should the greateſt Part of People ſit down, and draw up a particular Account of their Time, what a ſhameful Aſpect would it bear! So much extraordinary for eating, drinking, and ſleeping, beyond what Nature requires; ſo much in Revelling and Wantonneſs; ſo much for the Recovery of preceding Intemperance; ſo much for Gaming, Plays, and Maſquerades; ſo much in paying and receiving formal and impertinent Viſits; idle and fooliſh Talking and Jeſting, which are not convenient; in cenſuring and reviling our Neighbours; ſo much in Dreſſing and talking of the Faſhions; and ſo much waſted and loſt in doing Nothing.

to paſs away in the midſt of Confuſion, bitter Repentance ſeeks after in vain to recal. What was omitted to be done in its proper Moment, ariſes to be the Torment of ſome future Seaſon.

Manhood is diſgraced by the Conſequences of neglected Youth. Old-age (oppreſſed by Cares that belonged to a former Period) labours under a Burthen not its own.

At the Cloſe of Life, the dying Man beholds with Anguiſh that his Days are finiſhing, when his Preparation for Eternity is hardly commenced! Such are the Effects of a diſorderly Waſte of Time, thro' not attending to its real Value. Every thing in the Life of ſuch Perſons is miſplaced: Nothing is performed aright, from not being performed in due Seaſon. (*) But,

He who is orderly in the Diſtribution of his Time takes the proper Method of eſcaping thoſe manifold Evils; as he ſuffers no Part of it to eſcape without Profit.

He is juſtly ſaid to "redeem the Time." By proper Management he prolongs it. He lives much in little Space; more in a few Years than others in many. He can live to God, and his own Soul, and at the ſame Time attend to all the lawful Intereſts of the preſent World. He looks back on the paſt, and provides for the future. He catches and arreſts the Hours, as

(*) *Ordine reſpicies nunquam te Craſtina fallet.*

as they fly. They are marked down for useful Purposes, and their Memory remains. Whereas, he who neglects Order in the Arrangement of his Matters, is always losing the present in returning upon the past, and trying, in vain, to recover it when gone.

Indeed, nothing is a greater Argument of Wisdom, than the prudent Management of our Time; which will, upon serious Reflection, produce the greatest Satisfaction.

Whereas, those Hours flee by the Man of Confusion like a Shadow: His Days and Years are either Blanks, of which he has no Remembrance, or they are filled up with such a confused and irregular Succession of unfinished Transactions, that though he remembers he has been busy, yet, he can give no Account of the Business which has employed him. Of him, more than of any other, it may with Justice be pronounced, that "he walketh in a vain Shew, and is disquieted in vain." — Besides,

Being himself always found out of his proper Place, he, of Course interferes and jars with others; The Disorders which he raises never fail to spread beyond his own Line, and to involve many in Confusion; where he naturally becomes the Author of Tumult, Contention, and Discord. — Whereas,

Order is the Foundation of Union. It allows

every One to carry on his own Affairs without Diſturbance to others. It is the golden Chain, which holds together the Societies of Men in Friendſhip and Peace. In fine,

The Man of Order is connected with all the higher Powers and Principles in the Univerſe. He is the Follower of God. He walks with Him, and acts upon his Plan. His Character is formed on the Spirit which Religion breaths. To "walk ſinfully," and to "walk diſorderly," are ſynonimous Terms in Scripture. And "from ſuch as walk diſorderly" we are commanded, "in the Name of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, to with-draw ourſelves."

In "the New Earth, and the New Heavens," undiſturbed Order will forever prevail among the "Spirits of the Juſt, made perfect" — and whatever further Preparation may be requiſite for our being admitted to join their Society, it is certain we ſhall never ſhare in it, unleſs we make it now our Study to "do all things" (like them) "decently, and in Order." (*) It

(*) There is ſuch a Beauty in Method and Regularity, that One would imagine every Perſon muſt be enamoured with it, every Perſon obſerve it, on Account of the Facility with which it enables them to conduct their Affairs; the Eaſe with which they can tranſact their Buſineſs, ſtate their Accounts, and paſs thro the various Concerns of Life. Every outward Beauty proceeds from an inward Order and Harmony; and both the inward and outward Beauties are advanced by a proper Method. How

It may be ſaid, perhaps, that all this Order and Method

How agreeable is it to behold well-regulated Families! where there is Regularity, tho' even in the meaneſt Cottage, yet even there all is beautiful and pleaſant.

It is recorded to the Honour of the Friend of God, and the Father of the Faithful, with what admirable Order he commanded his Children and his Houſe-hold. It was for this Reaſon that he was made a great and mighty Nation! A manifeſt Proof, that (as the Apoſtle argues) the ſame Order, with which he conducted his own private Affairs, was equally proper to be extended over a great and mighty Nation.

Was it not the Æconomy, Regularity, and Method, with which every thing was conducted in the Court of Solomon; the Diſpoſition of his Fleets and Armies, - the Diſcipline of his Officers, - the Meat at his Table, - the fitting of his Servants, - the Attendance of his Miniſters, &c. that ſo particularly attracted the Admiration of the Queen of Sheba, and ſtruck her with ſuch Surprize, that "no more Spirit was left within her." Every One was placed in their reſpective Ranks, each had their particular Employment, and every thing was, (as under ſuch an Æconomical Direction, it neceſſarily muſt be) "beautiful in its Seaſon."

Order is Heaven's firſt Law—It is the true Parent of proſperous Succeſs. "A wiſe Man's Heart diſcerneth both Time and Judgement; for to every Purpoſe there is a Time and Seaſon;" and nothing is done well, that is done out of it.

Temporis Opportunitas omnium Rerum eſt primum. In Rebus agendis obſervemus Opportunitatem, ut in Tempore cuncta aggrediamur: Occaſio ſtatim eſt arripienda, ne ſi ſe ſubduxerit, fruſtrà quæras poſtea, quam priùs contempſeras. Quoties Fortuna offert Commoditatem aliquam quæ tibi ſit apta, ſtatim arripe; nàm Fronte capillata eſt Occaſio, ut eâ Parte teneri poſſit; verùm ſi ſe ſemel verterit, ab Occipitio calva eſt, ut a te apprehendi nequit. Hoc eſt, Opportunitas cùm contingit teneri poteſt; non redditur autèm, cùm volet, ſi neglexeris. Serm. CCCLVII.

Method is very troubleſome; only fit for dull People, and a diſagreeable Reſtraint to the noble Spirit and Fire of Youth, who are adviſed early to adopt it. Contrary-wiſe, it is aſſerted, that it will procure both more Time, and more Taſte for Pleaſures — and ſo far from being troubleſome, that after it is purſued but for a ſhort Time, it would be troubleſome to lay it aſide. — To Conclude,

"Since the Days that are paſt are gone for ever, and thoſe that are yet to come, may not be for us; it behoveth us to employ the preſent Time, without regretting the Loſs of that which is paſt, or too much depending on that which is to come.

"This Inſtant is thine; the next is in the Womb of Futurity, and thou knoweſt not what it may bring forth. Learn to eſteem Life as it ought, then art thou near the Pinnacle of Wiſdom.

"Think not with the Fool that nothing is more valuable; nor believe with the pretended Wiſe, that thou oughteſt to contemn it. Love it not for itſelf, but for the Good it may be of to thyſelf and to others.

"Gold cannot buy it for thee, neither can Mines of Diamonds purchaſe back the Moment thou haſt now loſt of it. Employ the ſucceeding Ones in Virtue.

"Say not, that it were beſt not to have been born; or, if born, that it had been beſt to die early: neither

dare

dare thou to aſk of thy Creator, where had been the Evil had I not exiſted? Good is in thy Power; the Want of Good is Evil; and, if thy Queſtion be juſt; lo! it condemneth thee.

"Make good Uſe of Time — reflect that Yeſterday is paſt, and cannot be recalled; To-morrow is to come, and cannot be enſured; — and that therefore, To-day is only thine, which if procraſtinated, is loſt; which loſt, is loſt forever.

"Whatſoever, therefore, thou reſolveſt to do, do it quickly, and with all thy Might; and defer not till the Evening, what the Morning ſhould accompliſh.

"Take from the Period of thy Life the uſeleſs Parts of it, and what remaineth? Take off the Time of thy Infancy, the ſecond Infancy of Age, thy Sleep, thy thoughtleſs Hours, and thy Days of Sickneſs, of Riot and Exceſs, and even at the Fulneſs of Years, how few Seaſons haſt thou truly numbered?" (*)

"Haſt thou, therefore, a Matter in Hand, and particularly ſo great a Matter as the Care of thy Soul and Religion, do it diligently, and with all thy Might; and depend not on the Morrow, which perhaps neither thou, nor thy Son may ſee."

"Behold, Now is the accepted Time; behold, Now is the Day of Salvation: Seek ye the Lord, therefore, while He may be found; call ye upon Him while he

(*) See Note (‡), Page 453. Serm. 357. is

is near; before your Feet ſtumble upon the dark Mountains, and the things which belong to your Peace be forever hid from your Eyes" † "before ye be overtaken with the Shadow of Deſtruction; and that Night cometh, wherein no Man can work;" (*) and "defer not till Death to be juſtified."

(*) *Dum Fires Annique fluunt, tolerate Labores,*
Jam venit tacito curva Senecta Pede.

Sermon

SERMON CCCLVIII.

The Danger of Delay, or Death-bed Repentance: an Incentive to Improvement of Time.

Ecc'us xviii. 22. "Defer not till Death to be juſ-
"tified."

Having in the preceding Subject exhorted to the duly improving of Time, and every Opportunity of Amendment, I ſhall now from theſe Words, further exhort to the ſame, from the Danger of Delay, and the Hazards of a Death-bed Repentance: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while He is near;" and, "defer not till Death to be juſtified."

After the many and repeated Exhortations in Scripture to Holineſs, Repentance, and Amendment, it is truly amazing to ſee how prone Men are to neglect ſo great a Concern, on whoſe Hands even Time itſelf is a Burthen, and who ſin, without Thoughts either of "repenting, turning to God, or doing Works meet for Repentance." — But,

If we believe that He only who leads a holy Life

can

can have "Hope in his Death," and that a Sinner who doth not timely repent, and "turn to God," is excluded the Covenant of Grace; then, considering the Uncertainty of Life, we have every Moment we continue in a sinful State "the Sentence of Death" in us.

It will be said, perhaps, that, though we do not design to put off our Repentance to the very last Period of our Lives, looking upon it at that Time as of no Consequence, we will one Time or other hereafter devote a considerable Part of it to the Service of God, in Order to prepare for a happy Death. — But,

Suppose our Lord should "come at a Day, or an Hour that we know not of," and before That future Time commences which we intended for our Reformation: In this Case our Condition must, according to our own Confession, be, in the ordinary Methods of God's Grace, hopeless and past remedy. (*)

There is one possible Remedy indeed, and but one, whereby we may hope in our last Extremity to be saved; and that is, by the Almighty Power of God.

He may, if He pleases, snatch us out of those Flames which our Sins would justly plunge us into.

He may, by the same supernatural Power, cause a Man to be born again when he is old." — But,

We can no more draw Consequences from what God can possibly do in one Case, than in the other; and,

(*) *Post Mortem Medicus.*

and, if He ſo ſeldom departs from the Simplicity of his Laws, and the ordinary Methods of his governing the World, for the Sake of good Men; why ſhould we think that He will interpoſe by a miraculous Power to ſave an incorrigible Sinner, one who hath hardened himſelf to the utmoſt, and taken all the Pains he could to work out his own Damnation? (*) — But,

Becauſe Sinners are more generally of Opinion, that a Death-bed Repentance may, if it be ſincere, at laſt ſave them, I ſhall more particularly apply what I have to ſay to ſuch Perſons, and deſire them to proceed with me in the following Conſiderations: — As,

Firſt, How little can be done by a wicked Man on his ſick or Death-bed? — The Whole of a Death-bed Repentence is generally no more than a few good Words and Wiſhes, a ſuperficial Confeſſion of Sin and Wickedneſs, ſome broken Prayers and pious Expreſſions to the Miniſter, who THEN perhaps ſhall be ſent for, however before deſpiſed; and it may be receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which he wholly neglected when in Health: this, with a Legacy of his ill-gotten Goods to charitable Uſes, is, in common Eſteem, making a good Chriſtian End.

Theſe

(*) If we will act wiſely, we are not to govern our Conduct by uncommon Caſes; but by the moſt probable and common Events of things—For Miracles are God's ſtrange Work, and which He ſeldom exerciſes but for particular Purpoſes. Serm. CCCLVIII.

Theſe Ways are but too common in the World: And ſhould he back his Prayer with Reſtitution of all that he hath gotten unjuſtly, and with Charity to the Poor, ſhould alſo add the Forgiveneſs of all the Injuries and Affronts he hath received from other Men, (which, indeed, are excellent Beginnings of a new Life, if done in Time,) yet there can be no Virtue or Praiſe in reſtoring that which we can no longer keep, or in giving away what we muſt neceſſarily part with: and, as for pardoning Injuries received, alas! wicked Men in their Life-time, take preſent Pay, immediate Revenge; there being not one Injury done them, that they have not fully returned. — And, laſtly, That the utmoſt that a ſick or dying Sinner can do, is to make ſtrong and ſincere Reſolutions againſt his former evil Courſes, and to walk in all Virtue and Godlineſs, ſhould God continue his Life.

This is what Men uſually truſt-to in this Extremity; they hope God will accept of ſuch unfeigned Reſolutions, for Repentance. Their Reſolutions are juſt according to the Degree of Danger they are in; ſo long as there are Hopes of Recovery, their Intentions of Amendment are weak and ſlender; but as Death comes near, their Reſolutions encreaſe, and get Strength; and when they find little Hopes of living any longer, then they ſtrenuouſly reſolve to live better; that is, they

promiſe

promiſe and vow to do, what according to their own Fears and Opinion is impoſſible to be done. And can we think God will accept of ſuch a Purpoſe of living well, founded on no other Conſideration or Motive, than that a Perſon believes his Life is juſt gone?

Secondly, It is extremely uncertain whether Men, who go on in a Courſe of Sin, in Hopes that they may remedy all at laſt by a Death-bed Repentance, will, when they come to die, have any Time to repent, and even do That Little, they may then, at beſt, be able to do. (*)

It is obvious that no Man is ſure of Life, for ſo much as the Space of one ſingle Moment. The Experience of every Day affords us abundant Proof, that even without God's interpoſing in the Way of a miraculous Judgment, a Sinner may eaſily be ſurprized with the Arreſt of Death; and, in the midſt of his Security, have his Hopes cut-off for ever; and find his Condition determined, without Poſſibility of Alteration, to an endleſs Eternity. Every thing within us, and every thing without us; every thing that is hurtful, and every thing that is beneficial to us; may prove the Occaſion of our Fall. The Seeds of a mortal Diſeaſe

(*) Time and Tide ſtay for no Man. Procraſtination is the Thief of Time. Dalays are dangerous. See the Note Vol. vi. Page 355, and 427, and 444, of this Vol. Serm. CCCLVIII.

ſeaſe, may already be formed in our Bodies; and Millions of external Accidents, are perpetually ready to deſtroy us. If the Guilt of wilful Sin be upon us, we are actually under the Sentence of God's Wrath; and if in that State we be called to appear in Judgment, that Sentence will become irreverſible by being immediately executed upon us. The Danger that every wilful Sinner is perpetually in upon this Account, is greater than can be expreſſed; and, if they were duly ſenſible of it, greater than could be ſupported: In the Time of Sickneſs and at the apparent Approach of Death, it becomes wholly intolerable, and fills the Souls of the moſt hardened Sinners, with inexpreſſible Amazement. The Danger is really the ſame, how little ſoever ſenſible they be of it, to a great Number of Sinners, in the midſt of their Heath and Mirth; and may, for ought they can tell, be ſo equally to them All: Death being every Day very near to ſome of them that leaſt expect it; and no ſingle Sinner can have any Security that it is not ſo Now to Him; and if it be, he without Remedy periſhes for ever.

We all ſtand upon the Brink of a Precipice, where the Ground is every Moment ſinking under our Feet; and no Caution, no Prudence, no Foreſight of ours, can poſſibly prevent it. "For Man alſo, (as Solomon expreſſes it,) knoweth not his Time; but as the Fiſhes

that

that are taken in an evil Net, and as the Birds that are caught in the Snare; ſo are the Sons of Men ſnared in an evil Time, when it falleth ſuddenly upon them."

Sinners vainly boaſt themſelves of To-morrow, and flatter themſelves with Hopes of becoming more religious after MANY Years; but alas! they know not what a Day, what an Hour, what a Moment may bring forth. The very next Night may put a Period to their Hopes forever; and when they lie down to Sleep in a careleſs Security, they may at their awakening find themſelves in a Portion of eternal Miſery.

Our Saviour warns us of this, in the Parable of the Rich Man; who when he had ſaid to himſelf, "Soul, thou haſt much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry;" God ſaid unto him, "Thou Fool, this Night ſhall thy Soul be required of thee, and then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be, which thou haſt provided?" Upon which, our Lord adds an earneſt Exhortation to all his Diſciples, "Let your Loins be girded about, and your Lights burning, and ye yourſelves like unto Men that wait for their Lord." Again, "This know, that if the good Man of the Houſe had known what Hour the Thief would come, he would have watched, and not have ſuffered his Houſe to be broken through; Be ye therefore ready alſo; for the Son of Man cometh at an Hour that ye

think not." And again, – "If that Servant ſay in his Heart, My Lord delayeth his coming; and ſhall begin to beat the Men-ſervants and Maidens, and to eat, and drink, and be drunken; The Lord of that Servant will come in a Day when he looketh not for him, at an Hour that he is not aware; and will cut him aſunder, and will appoint him his Portion with the Unbelievers." The ſame Caution he repeats by St. John, in his Epiſtle to the Church of Sardis; "If thou ſhalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief, and thou ſhalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee." And St. Paul very emphatically; "For yourſelves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord ſo cometh, as a Thief in the Night; For when they ſhall ſay, Peace and Safety; then ſudden Deſtruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child; and they ſhall not eſcape: Therefore let us not ſleep, (ſaith he,) as do others; but let us watch and be ſober."

God oftentimes makes himſelf known by the ſwift Judgment which He executes on ſuch notorious Offenders. He frequently cuts the Threads of their Lives ſhort, and takes them away in the midſt of their Days, and Sins together. — And,

It is in vain to hope, that either Youth or Strength, that either Policy or Power, can protect a Sinner's Life,

Life, "when God hath prepared for him the Inſtruments of Death." (*)

Could we arreſt Time, and be at Agreement with the Grave, and, like Joſhua, ſtay the Sun in the Heaven from going down till we had avenged ourſelves leiſurably upon the Enemies of our Salvation; or, with Hezekiah, as in the Dial of Ahaz, cauſe the lengthened Shadow of Life to go many Degrees backward, there might THEN be ſome Excuſe for our Delay in this. — But,

None of theſe things are poſſible to us; for, God, who hath all Nature at his Command, can make a thouſand unforeſeen Accidents, or the moſt inconſiderable of his Creatures, inſtrumental in the Hands of his avenging Juſtice. (†)

Many Inſtances might be given, ſome perhaps out of our own Obſervation, to this Purpoſe; but, for certain, the longer a Man lives to provoke the Divine Diſpleaſure,

(*) Where God putteth to his Hand, there is no Power can reſiſt Him. "He doeth what he will in the Armies of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth"—"For there is no Wiſdom, nor Underſtanding, nor Counſel againſt the Lord." "There is no Man that hath Power over the Spirit, neither hath he Power in the Day of Death: and there is no Diſcharge in that War; neither ſhall Wickedneſs deliver thoſe that are given to it."

(†) *Mortis mille Figuræ—Plurima Mortis Imago.*
Death hath a thouſand Shapes.
Serm. CCCLVIII.

ſure, the more Reaſon he hath to fear that this may be his own Caſe.

We cannot promiſe to ourſelves a future Moment. Death lies concealed in every Path we tread; and his Stroke will ever be ſudden and dreadful in Proportion to the Degree of our Forgetfulneſs of it, and our Attachment to the World. (*) But, Thirdly,

(*) In the Liturgy of the Church of *England*, we pray God to deliver us from *ſudden Death*; (i.e) as her beſt Divines have always explained it, and as Reaſon clearly underſtands it, from a Death *ſudden* and *unlook'd for*; from a Death inſtantaneous and unexpected; for which no Proviſion has been made, which finds the Soul utterly unprepared, and ſends the unhappy Mortal to Eternity, with all his Imperfections upon him! A Death like this is doubtleſs to be deprecated, more than the wide-waſting Peſtilence, or the devouring Sword. — On the other Side, to the good Man, to the Soul conſcious of its own frail Dependence here, and properly careful to ſecure its Intereſts in the World beyond the Grave; a ſudden Death is ſo far from an Evil, that it appears rather a Bleſſing; and in this View hath been earneſtly wiſhed by many Men of exemplary Piety.

Indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, there is no ſuch thing as ſudden Death to us, who "as ſoon as we are born, begin to draw to our End;" who breath this ſublunary Air, as temporary Strangers, exiſting only a while upon the Bounty of Providence; and aſſured that the Moment will come ſhortly, may come inſtantly, when the Lord of our Life ſhall ſummon us into his tremendous Preſence!

And, as ſuch is the Condition of our Being, we cannot properly call that Stroke *ſudden*, to live in conſtant Expectation of which is our higheſt Wiſdom, and Duty. Submiſſion to the Will of Him, who is as good as he is wiſe, is doubtleſs the beſt Service which ſuch im-

Thirdly, Another Argument is, that Virtue or Holineſs of Life, is the abſolutely neceſſary and indiſpenſible Condition, upon which alone the Goſpel affords Men any Hopes of Salvation, and any Title to the Promiſes of God.

Our Saviour declares, that, "at the Day of Judgment he will bid to depart from him all the Workers of Iniquity," whatever Pleas they may otherwiſe make of their having been his Diſciples. And St. Paul expreſsly aſſures us, that "without Holineſs, no Man ſhall ſee the Lord." And having inſtanced in ſuch Practices as are contrary to Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs, he tells his Converts with great Earneſtneſs, and repeats it again and again, that "they who do ſuch things ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God." And indeed the whole Scripture throughout, conſtantly repreſents it as the great, the indiſpenſible End, and chief

imperfect Creatures can pay in every Particular. And therefore we act moſt wiſely when we ſubmit the Determination of this Point to the Father of Mercies, and ſit with Reſignation either for the momentary Stroke, or the long and lingering Trial, which diſmiſſeth us from the Stage of Life.---This Care only ſhould be our's; well to act our Parts; that the Diſmiſſion may be with the Plaudit and Approbation of our Judge. Death is the ſame thing, which Way ſoever it cometh; only we are more moved by Accidents that we are not uſed to.---How doubly dreadful is Death when it hurries away an affrighted and unprepared Soul from all the Splendor and Pomp of earthly Greatneſs! Serm. CCCLVIII.

chief Design of the Gospel, to oblige us "to put off the old Man, to mortify the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts, and to be renewed in the Spirit of our Minds; to purify ourselves from all Filthiness both of Flesh and Spirit, and to perfect Holiness in the Fear of God." — Now,

This is certainly a Work of Time and Care, an Employment that well deserves to be the Business of a whole Life; and which They who begin the soonest, and make the fewest Delays, will find they have not too much Time to finish. And if a virtuous Life be the only and indispensible Condition of the Gospel, nothing can be more vain than to expect that God will, instead thereof, accept a few empty Resolutions, and fruitless Professions of ineffective Sorrow, at the Approach of Death. To go on at present in a Course of Wickedness or in the Practice of any known Vice, upon such an Expectation, is wholly to take-away the Necessity of virtuous Living; and Obedience to God's Commands cannot be so indispensible, as both Scripture and Reason represent it, if it matters not how long it be, before we set about it.

Such Imaginations cannot proceed, but from very evil Causes and Principles, "from the Gall of Bitterness, and from the Bond of Iniquity;" from such Principles, as are altogether inconsistent with Sincerity;

incon-

inconsistent with Any Sincerity even of that very Design of Repenting hereafter, upon which all the Hope of delaying Sinners are founded. For how can a Man with any Sincerity design to repent of That Action, which yet at the present he resolves to commit? How can he intend seriously to wish That undone hereafter, when it shall be impossible to undo it; which now, while it is in his Power, he will by no Means be perswaded to forbear doing? What greater possible Mockery can any Man be guilty of, both before God and Man? It is directly contradictory to the very Nature and Essence of Repentance, to design to Repent hereafter, and not do it Now. For what is Repentance, but a Change of Mind, a Sorrow for what is past, a Desire of undoing it as far as is possible, and an acting in a contrary Manner for the Time to come?

Now how can a Man intend to change his Mind? How can he resolve, that for the Time to come he will think That foolish and unfit to be chosen; which yet at present he will obstinately choose? If he thinks a thing fit to be done Now; how can he intend hereafter to think it was unfit? And if he designs hereafter to think it was unfit, how is it possible for him now to think it fit & reasonable? A Man may always indeed upon better Information, reasonably change his Mind; and it may be a great Instance of Wisdom, to disap-

prove and repent hereafter, of what he ignorantly and foolishly chuses Now. But to intend Now, at the very Time that he does the Act, to disapprove and repent of it hereafter; this is clearly as direct an Inconsistency, as that a Person should be of two contrary Opinions, at one and the same Time. Whoever repents worthily, would give all the World, if it were in his Power, that he had never forfeited the Favour of God: And therefore that any Man should sincerely intend such a Repentance, at the same Time that he deliberately chooses, upon some trivial Temptation, to offend and provoke the Almighty, is altogether impossible to be conceived: It is like a Traveller's going out of his Way on Purpose, that he may have the Trouble of returning into it again; It is as absurd, as if a Man should choose to take Poison, on Purpose that he might run the Hazard of recovering his Health by an Antidote; or that a Sea-faring Person should desire Ship-wreck, on Purpose that he might have a Possibility of being saved upon a Plank; and that even This Plank itself he would defer as long as possible, before he would lay hold of it. The Folly in both Cases is equally great, and the Choice, were there no Blindness and Deceit in the Case, is equally impossible.

It is very evident therefore, that in habitual Sinners, all Designs of future Repentance, are mere Delusions, and

and not any hearty Intention of becoming truly virtuous and religious at all. — But,

Fourthly, This is not all. For, ſuppoſing a Sinner ſhould not be ſurprized by a ſudden, immediate Death, that he may be ſpared to Old Age, and even then have Warning given of his approaching Diſſolution by the gradual Advances of it; Inſtances, we own, may be produced of Perſons, as wicked, perhaps, as himſelf, who have gone to their Graves without any remarkable Diſtinction, in Point of Untimelineſs, from Men of much better Character. And, what has been the Caſe of others, may poſſibly be his: Nor ſhall we refuſe him the Praiſe of that Wiſdom, which is, in other Caſes, allowed to thoſe who needleſsly hazard their ALL upon a bare Poſſibility. Suppoſing, however, this were not only poſſible, but probable; nay, and that it ſhould, in the End prove actually his Caſe: and further, ſuppoſing there was no Deceit in this Matter; and that ſuch Delays were conſiſtent (as they manifeſtly are not) with a real, ſincere and hearty Intention of Repenting at ſome Time or other; yet conſider what he hath to depend on even then. It is, that he ſhall be both willing and able to repent in Old Age, or upon a dying Bed: that is, that he ſhall have Inclination to ſet about, and Strength to go through, one of the moſt irkſome and difficult Taſks in Nature, a Taſk, indeed,

by mere Nature impracticable, an entire Change of Heart and Affections; that, after innumerable Acts of Diſobedience and Unfaithfulneſs, after numberleſs Mercies abuſed, and Talents miſemployed, he ſhall, notwithſtanding, make himſelf ready for an Interview with his Lord, and for an Entrance into his Joy! And all this, at a Time when Infirmity or Sickneſs ſhall have rendered him unequal to the ordinary Employments of this Life!

Much rather is it to be ſuppoſed that he will have no Inclination hereto; or even, if he ſhould, that the Intention itſelf, in all Probability, will never be put in Practice; becauſe there can be no Reaſon for continuing in Sin at preſent, but what will perpetually grow ſtronger againſt forſaking it hereafter. The common and moſt uſual Reaſon of Delay, in thoſe who pretend to any Deſign of reforming at all, is the Difficulty of doing That at preſent in the Midſt of Temptation, which they hope they ſhall hereafter be able to do more eaſily, when the Temptation is removed. But this is a very great and fatal Miſtake. For whatever Difficulties they are at preſent ſenſible of, will either increaſe continually in Proportion to the Delay; or new and greater Difficulties will ariſe in their ſtead. Cuſtom itſelf becomes a Temptation, even upon its own Account; and (beſides all other Temptations to Sin,) the

the very Habit of having frequently done any thing, makes it perpetually more and more difficult (even separate from all other Temptations,) to break off the Practice. The Accidental Changes of Age and Company, and other Circumstances of Life, may indeed vary Mens Temptations; but they seldom or never remove them. And the Mind that is so much under the Power and Dominion of Sin, that it cannot think of leaving it, so long as the particular Temptation remains; may, upon the ceasing of That Temptation, alter perhaps the Instances of its Folly and Wickedness, but will not the more easily return into the Ways of Virtue and true Wisdom. Even as the Matter of a bodily Disease, by shifting from one Part to another, may perhaps vary the Symptoms of its Malignity and Danger, but does not therefore make the Person at all the nearer to Health, unless it be wholly eradicated and expelled. On the contrary: As the Diseases of the Body grow so much the more dangerous and difficult to cure, by how much the Longer the Remedy is neglected, so to Reclaim the Mind out of a State of Wickedness, is always so much the more difficult, by how much the longer the Amendment has been put off. Even tho perhaps the particular Instance of the Temptation may be changed, yet the Power of Sin in general is unquestionably increased, and the Heart more and

more enslaved with unrighteous Practices, and further estranged continually from God and Goodness.

By Continuance in Sin, Men grow more and more hardened thro the Deceitfulness of it, both by the just Judgment of God, and by the natural Consequence of the Thing itself. Their Conscience becomes stupified and insensible, their Judgment depraved and incapable of distinguishing things rightly, their Understanding darkened and blinded, their Mind alienated from God and Virtue, their Will and Affections more & more biassed and inclined to Evil, the Assistance of the Grace of God, every Day diminished; and in every Respect, the longer Men delay, the more they incapacitate themselves for that indispensible Work, which, if it be not perfected, they must perish forever.

They too often bring themselves at last into that sad deplorable Condition, which the Apostle describes by being "dead in Trespasses and Sins;" (c) having so far lost all Sense of Virtue and Religion, as that there is little more Hope of ever recovering them, than there is of bringing even the Dead to Life again.

Concerning These it is, that the Prophet elegantly complains: "Can the Ethiopian change his Skin, nor the Leopard his Spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." And the Wise Man, "That which is crooked, cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting, cannot be numbered." If

If by any Means, ſuch Perſons come at any Time to be thoroughly awakened into a Senſe of their Danger, and to ſee the abſolute Neceſſity of changing their Courſe of Life immediately; yet their Reſolutions are weak and unſtable as Water, and their Hope apt to be wavering and without any certain Foundation. They are ſure that God, as well as their own Conſcience, is very juſtly and highly offended; the Number and Heinouſneſs of their paſt Sins terrifies them beyond Meaſure; the Difficulties before them, in the little Time they have left, appear inſurmountable; and their Security, is on a ſudden turned into a peviſh and diſconſolate Deſpair. They were preſumptuous, and negligent to conquer thoſe Difficulties, which at firſt hindered their entering into the Paths of Virtue, like a ſmall Rivulet that obſtructed their Paſſage; and now the Obſtacle is ſwelled into an overflowing Stream, "like Jordan in the Time of Harveſt." This Compariſon is very elegantly ſet forth by the Prophet; "If thou haſt run with Footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canſt thou contend with Horſes? and if in the Land of Peace wherein thou truſtedſt, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the Swellings of Jordan?" Sin is of a moſt infatuating Nature, and corrupts not only the Heart, but the Underſtanding alſo; and who knows where it may end? He

He who propoſed at firſt to reform his Ways after ſome Time, and to return to God, may come to doubt whether there be a God. — And,

When a Man is come to this Way of thinking, there is not even a diſtant Probability of his Repentance and Amendment: — and it is not at all unlikely that he ſhall fall into ſuch prophane Sentiments; ſince a long Courſe of offending does, of itſelf, induce a Man to wiſh there was no God: — And! from wiſhing to believing, the Diſtance we know is not great.

True it is, that an immediate Senſe of Danger and Death may bring back the ancient and more natural Fear of God: but, this may come too late, and produce Deſpair inſtead of Repentance. — Beſides,

He may be deprived of the Uſe of his Reaſon and Underſtanding: — many Infirmities of Body and Mind may deprive him, in a great Meaſure, of theſe; and render him incapable of performing any rational Act of any Kind; — or, the Pains of his Diſtemper may ſeize upon him in ſo violent a Manner, that though he may have ſome confuſed Notions and Deſigns of Repentance, yet he cannot, without great Diſtraction, apply his Thoughts diſtinctly to the Buſineſs. (*)

Now,

(*) If we make Religion the Buſineſs of our whole Lives, and in every thing exercise ourſelves to keep a Conſcience unblamable; yet

Now, Repentance is a Work which, at all Times, but yet when we come to die, we find Work enough to employ us. To behave decently and as becomes Christians in such a Condition, patiently to bear our Affliction, chearfully to submit to God's Will, to beg Pardon for our manifold Failings and Miscarriages, readily to leave the World, and all that is dear to us in it; These, and many more, are the Exercises of a Christian on a Bed of Sickness. And how few are there that are then able to bear up with any tolerable Courage? — We do not count him a wise Man that will leave so much as his worldly Affairs at that Time unsettled. And when our very natural Powers and Faculties are disabled, when our Bodies are full of Pain, and our Minds of Distractions and Perplexities, how shall we be able to do all that Work, for which our whole Life is little enough, and for which we were born into the World?

Let those who think of deferring their Repentance till a Death-bed, sometimes visit sick Persons; let them look on their Condition, when dying, and then judge whether that be a fit Time to do so great a Work in? They may then see how troubled and disturbed their Thoughts and Minds as well as Bodies are; how full their Reason & Understanding decay; how their Memories are lost, their Senses fail them, and how unable to help themselves.

Viscera torquentur primo, Flammæque latenti
Lucidior Rubor est, et dictus Anhelitus Ignis;
Aspera Lingua tumet, tepidisque madentia Ventis
Ora patent; Auxæ graves captantur Hauſtus.
Non Stratum, non ulla pati Velamina possunt;
Tantaque sunt Miseris invisa Tædia Lecti;
Prosiliunt, aut, à prohibent consistere Vires,
Corpora devolvunt in Humum, fugiuntque Penates
Quisque suos, sua cuique Domus funesta videtur;
Aspicere flentes alios, Terræque jacentes.

Serm. CCCLVIII. Lastly,

but especially at a Time when a thorough Change is to be wrought at once in a corrupt Heart, requires great Attention, and exceeding Composure of Mind; therefore, when a Man is so disordered, both in Body and Mind, that he is commonly unfit to settle his temporal Affairs, (if there hath been no care taken to that End before-hand,*) he will certainly be much more unfit

Lasque vorsantes supremo Lumine Motu;
Membraque pendentis tendunt ad Limina Cæli,
Hic, illic, ubi Mors deprenderat, exhalantes.
In Vultu Color est sine Sanguine, Lumina mœsta
Stant immota Genis, nihil est in Imagine vivum.
Ipsa quoque intrinsecùs cum dura Lingua Palato
Congelat, et Vocem affluunt posse moveri,
Nec facti Cervix, nec Brachia reddere Motus.

Surely such a State, as this, must be very unfit for the due Exercise of any serious Matter, much less of so great a One as the Case before us. Is this a Time to prepare for Eternity, to vanquish all Sins, and to obtain all Grace? Is this the fittest Opportunity we can chuse to make our Peace with God, to sue out our Pardon, and to perform all those Duties of Piety, Mercy, Justice and Charity, in which we have been hitherto defective? or rather are not they happy, who at such a Time have nothing else to do but to die?

(*) The Affairs of Families being generally left in so confused a State, that Strifes and Contests are often the Result, it is not without great Charity they are advised to settle their temporal Affairs whilst in Health; which, to do wisely, requires Time and Consideration; and therefore, &c. [under]

[illegible] Time [illegible] Time [illegible] Time [illegible] Difficulty [illegible] those Moments taken up in ordering and disposing of his worldly Affairs, which ought to be employed in preparing for Eternity. [illegible], &c. (next Page)

unfit to examine "how many and great the Sins of his Life have been," and to ſtate Accounts ſo long depending between God and his own Soul.

No Man is ordinarily fit for this in the Agonies of Death: — It is then Burden enough to be old and ſick, to be ſick and die. Amidſt the Struggles, and under the Load of Sickneſs or Pain, it is not Time for unaccuſtomed Exertions to be made, or for new Reformations to begin. "Sufficient," & more than ſufficient, "for that

ſo that except we make our Wills in the Days of our Health, this Matter may poſſibly never be performed, or after ſuch an imperfect Manner, as to convey Strife and Contention to our Poſterity, and at beſt give great Trouble and Uneaſineſs to ourſelves, when we are leaſt able to bear it.

It requires Thought and Conſideration to diſpoſe of our Eſtates in a Chriſtian Manner, to give Children their fitting Portions, to acknowledge the Kindneſs of Friends, to reward the Services of our Dependants, and to make Diſtribution for the Poor and Needy; and all this in ſo clear a Manner, that no Differences or Lawſuits may ariſe among thoſe we leave behind us; the laſter of theſe, [viz.] Charity to the Poor, thoſe who are of Ability ſhould be eſpecially mindful of at theſe Times; and, out of the Abundance they are about to leave, beſtow ſome liberal Largeſs on them. For, of all our Poſſeſſions, That alone which we thus diſpoſe of, is laid up in Store for Eternity. Our good Works are our only Riches that will follow us to the Grave; and therefore there is no Time more ſeaſonable for this than Sickneſs, when we are preparing to go [illegible]

but especially at a Time when a thorough Change is to be wrought at once in a corrupt Heart, requires great Attention, and exceeding Composure of Mind; therefore, when a Man is so disordered, both in Body and Mind, that he is commonly unfit to settle his temporal Affairs, (if there hath been no care taken to that End before-hand,*) he will certainly be much more unfit

Lassaque versantes supremo Lumina Motu
Membraque pendentis sudant ad Limina Cœli,
Hic, illic, alii Mors deprenderat, exhalantes.
In Vultu Color & fœdo Sanguine, Lumina mœsta
Stant immota Genis, nihil & In Imagine vivum.
Ipsa quoque intrinsecus cum dare Dogma Palato
Conatur, & Fœnus Asylum post mœsta,
Nec satis Cervix, nec Brachia valdere Motus.

Surely such a State as this, must be very unfit for the due Exercise of any serious Matter, much less of so great a One as the Case before us. Is this a Time to prepare for Eternity, to vanquish all Sins, and to obtain all Grace? Is this the fittest Opportunity we can chuse to make our Peace with God, to sue out our Pardon, and to perform all those Duties of Piety, Mercy, Justice and Charity, in

Consideration, and therefore cannot be so well dispatched in our last Moments, when our Minds are disordered, our Bodies oppressed with Pain and Sickness, and when we run the Hazard of being imposed upon by those who out of Interest officiously attend us;

(next Page)

unfit to examine "how many and great the Sins of his Life have been," and to ſtate Accounts ſo long depending between God and his own Soul.

No Man is ordinarily fit for this in the Agonies of Death:—It is then Burden enough to be old and ſick, to be ſick and die. Amidſt the Struggles, and under the Load of Sickneſs or Pain, it is not Time for unaccuſtomed Exertions to be made, or for new Reformations to begin. "Sufficient," & more than ſufficent, "for that

[redacted]

of the Sick) hath wiſely directed the Miniſter, when he attends the ſick Perſon, if he hath not diſpoſed of his Goods, to admoniſh him "to make his Will, and to declare his Debts, what he owes, and what is owing to him, for the better diſcharging his Conſcience, and the quieting of his Executors;" withal acknowledging, "that Men ſhould often be put in Remembrance to take Order for the ſettling their temporal Eſtates whilſt they are in Health."

Serm. CCCLVIII.

that Day is the evil thereof." (*) It will be too late to assume then the Hero or the Saint, if we have been totally unacquainted with the Characters before. The Sentiments we would display, and the Language we would utter, will be alien and strange to us. They will be forced and foreign to the Heart. It is only in Consequence of Habits acquired in former and better Days, that a Temper of Piety and Charity can grow up into such Strength as to confer Peace and Magnanimity on the concluding Hours of Life.

(*) *Senectus ipsa est Morbus. Multa Senem circumvenient Incommoda.* "If a Man live many Years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the Days of Darkness, for they shall be many." Youth is full of Disorder, and Age of Infirmity. See Vol. xviii. P. 339, 340.

Sermon

SERMON CCCLIX.

On the ſame Subject.

Arguments continued.

Eccl. xviii. 22. "Defer not till Death to be juſ-
"tified."

There is not any thing that ſo notoriouſly defeats the Deſign of our Saviour's coming into the World, and renders Chriſtianity ſo uſeleſs to us, as This one Preſumption; that the Whole of Religion, or All that is neceſſary to Salvation, may be performed upon a ſick or Death-bed; for if it may be done as well then as before, why need we attempt it ſooner? why need we diſquiet ourſelves in vain, about the Exerciſes of Virtue and Piety, or maintain a painful and ungrateful Conflict with the Inclinations and inordinate Cravings of our Fleſh; when, by lamenting at any Time our Sins, and truſting to the Performance of Jeſus Chriſt, we may be as ſecure of Paradiſe, as if we had all our Days "kept a Conſcience void of Offence, both to-
"wards God and towards Men?"

But as eternal Bliſs and Happineſs is a thing of ſuch vaſt

vast Moment to us, that to defer making Provision for it, but one Day, is certainly a very great Indiscretion; so for Man to devote all his Days to his own Pleasure and Humour, and reserve for God, for whose Service he was born, but one Day only, and that the worst and the last. This is perfect Madness, and the utmost Stupidity. The extreme Folly and Danger of which, I have already evinced by several Particulars:

First, I considered how little can be done by a wicked Man on his Sick or Death-Bed.

Secondly, It is extremely uncertain whether Men, who go on in a Course of Sin, in Hopes that they may remedy all at last by a Death-bed Repentance, will, when they come to die, have any Time to repent, and even do that little, they may then, at best, be able to do.

Thirdly, I shewed that Virtue or Holiness of Life is the absolutely necessary and indispensible Condition, upon which alone the Gospel affords Men any Hopes of Salvation, and any Title to the Promises of God.

Fourthly, Supposing a Sinner should not be surprized by a sudden Death, and that such Delays were consistent (as they manifestly are not) with a real, sincere, and hearty Repentance at one Time or other; yet, all that he hath reason to depend on, is, that he shall be both willing and able to repent in Old age, & upon a dying Bed. But this we have proved to be very deceitful

For,

For, Supposing the Almighty should be so merciful to a Sinner as to allow him not only a short Time to prepare for Death, but also the free and undisturbed Use of his Reason; and further, that the Approaches of Death should be so easy and gradual as to give a Man no sensible Pain of Body, or Disturbance of Mind; yet, Fifthly, It is still uncertain, whether he may find in his Heart any true Inclinations to Repentance; for, it is no easy Matter for a Man to have what he hath all his Life long placed his greatest Happiness and Satisfaction in, or even to desire to free himself from the Chains which have held him for so many Years in so agreeable a Captivity. Few Men have such Power over themselves; and no Man can have it without the especial Grace of God, which those, who have long "done Despite to the Spirit of Grace," have, of All Persons, the least Reason to hope for; though (God knows) they stand in Need of a far greater Measure and Degree of it: we therefore find, that old habitual Sinners sometimes go out of the World without discovering any sensible Remorse for their Sins; and, in particular, that they, whose Hearts have been for a long Time wholly set upon the World, cannot get their Thoughts free from it, though at the very Moment it is sinking, as it were, from under them.

So great is the Power of evil Habits not only to cor-

rupt our Hearts, but alſo to infatuate our Minds, and to ſtifle the common Sentiments of Reaſon, as well as thoſe of Grace and Religion together.

Men may think, perhaps, that how vicious and irregular ſoever their Lives have been; yet there can be nothing more eaſy than at any Time to put in Practice a Deſign, ſo very juſt and reaſonable, as That of repenting and turning to God, and doing what they are convinced they ought to do.

The Juſtice and Reaſonableneſs of ſuch a Deſign, is indeed, what we are all convinced of; — but, if it be as eaſy to put in Practice, as the Sinner ſuppoſes, why does he not forthwith ſet about it? — If he was not able to beat down his ſinful Paſſions, while he was but young in his Sins, and but yet entering upon a wicked Courſe of Life, or had not far advanced in it; why ſhould he imagine himſelf capable of making a more powerful Reſiſtance againſt future Temptation? — If he will not retreat while Conſcience is yet tender, and he has ſome Strength and good Diſpoſition of Mind left, what Probability can there be of his maintaining the Combat, when the Enemy ſtill advances, and every Moment gains Ground and Strength upon him?

In Proportion as his ſinful Paſſions and Inclinations are indulged, the greater Power they get over him, and ſo much the more Time and Pains, and Force of Mind

Mind will be requisite to subdue them; especially if they be grown up into confirmed and settled Habits.

All Habits naturally, or rather mechanically, produce a Facility of Action, and many things which we accustom ourselves to, tho, at first, troublesome, yet, by Degrees, grow easy; and, in Time, pleasant and delightful: — but Sin strikes early in with our Tempers and Inclinations; — it approaches us with deluding Smiles, and promises present Delight; and we are never sooner conquered than when we take the Field against Pleasure.

When, therefore, any sinful Inclination is become habitual to us, when it has got the Dominion over us, when it has for a long Time defiled the Imagination, and (as it commonly happens) infatuated our Reason, how discouraging must the Attempt, how painful the Endeavour be, to recover our former Freedom, and the Power which we have so shamefully lost?

Let us consider it a little further; when a Sinner has brought himself into this wretched Condition, when the very Desire of being freed from his Chains is become difficult to him, and yet he sins with a Design of repenting one Time or other; how vain, and senseless, and full of Contradiction does such a Design appear? and what Probability, or rather indeed, what Possibility is there of hoping for any good Effects from it?

We ſhould, therefore, look upon ſuch a Deſign as this [viz.] of "ſinning now, with an Intention to repair all hereafter by Repentance," as a ſtrong Deluſion of Satan, to ruin us with himſelf, and to cheat us of our Salvation. It being one of the Artifices of the Devil to continue us by this Means in Sin, till at laſt we be finally hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of it.

Add to this, the Sinfulneſs of it. As it is the greateſt Folly imaginable to venture a Matter of ſuch Conſequence upon ſuch an Uncertainty as future Time; which we can never be ſure of, and to defer a neceſſary Work to the moſt unfitting Seaſon of performing it; ſo it is highly wicked, in that we abuſe God's Patience, who gives us Time and Opportunity for it at Preſent, and prefer the Slavery of Sin before his Service; it is a Contempt of his Laws, and of that Wrath which is revealed from Heaven againſt all Unrighteouſneſs; and we may therefore juſtly fear that ſuch a Procedure may provoke God to withdraw that Grace which will then be neceſſary for the Exerciſe of our Repentance, tho he ſhould give us Time and Opportunity for it.

Think, what it muſt be, on Preſumption of a bare Poſſibility, a Poſſibility too clogged with ſuch Circumſtances, knowingly to continue in a State of Unpreparedneſs for our laſt Hour! A State, in which, ſhould

ſhould that Hour overtake us, we are ſure not only to loſe an eternal Weight of Glory, but to be miſerable for ever! we ſay it again, For ever! that is, not for a few Days, or Weeks, or Years, no, nor Millions of Ages; but for a Duration endleſs and unmeaſurable even in Thought; and which, when all theſe Portions of Time ſhall be paſt and gone, will be no nearer to its Concluſion than it now is. I am at a loſs for a Name for ſuch a Proceeding. Folly, or even Madneſs, muſt become Sounds without Meaning, ſhould they pretend to convey any juſt Conception of it.

Laſtly, Let us ſuppoſe further that a Sinner in his laſt Moments, may have ſome good Inclinations towards Repentance, yet, as his penitential Reſolutions are founded only upon ſuch Temporary Principles as the Fear of Death, and the Abſence of Temptation, it is uncertain whether they will be ſo well grounded, or riſe ſo high, as to make his Repentance ſincere – for, at ſuch a Time, it may proceed only from the Fear of ſuffering the Puniſhment due to his Sins; and not from any Hatred to the Sins themſelves, or Love to God and Goodneſs. And! a Repentance, thus without Principle, can by no Means avail him. — For,

It is natural for wicked Men, if they are not "wholly given over to a reprobate Mind," and "hardened through the Deceitfulneſs of Sin," to have their Con-

ſciences awakened under the Apprehenſions of Death and a Judgment to come; So that they cannot but wiſh, at leaſt, that they had ſerved God more faithfully, and never indulged themſelves in thoſe tranſient Pleaſures of Sin, for which they are now in imminent Danger of "ſuffering the Vengeance of eternal Fire." — It is queſtioned, indeed, whether the Devils themſelves, "who believe and tremble," are not Penitents in this Senſe.

This indeed is no more than the Repentance of an hardened Malefactor in his laſt Moments. (*) A mere Motion of Self-love is ſufficient to fill him with Regret for having made himſelf a Sacrifice to public Juſtice, without any real Change in his Temper and Diſpoſition. (†) And the Repentance of a dying Libertine, it is to be feared, ſeldom proceeds from any better Principle than that of a ſervile Fear of ſuffering for his Sins; for, he now finds that he can ſin no longer, and that there is no other Remedy left to deliver him from the Puniſhment of them, but to "repent, and turn to God. — Beſides,

He looks upon the Terrors which he feels in his Con-

(*) *Sera, ſed non Sera.*

See the Note, in Vol. vii. Page 105, added after Page 78.

(†) Sorrow, which is bred from worldly Conſiderations, or which proceeds only from a Fear of Puniſhment, but is not accompanied with a Love of God and Amendment, is not a ſaving Repentance.

Conscience, and the Indignation which he expresses at himself for having incurred the Wrath of God, as proper Evidences of the Sincerity of his Repentance; (*) but, alas! how often do they prove themselves

(*) A Man may very well, at the amazing Approach of Death and Judgment, be extremely sorry that he has lived wickedly; he may strongly wish that he had lived the Life of the Righteous; and believe, if he were to live over again, that he would do so; and yet all this may be merely the Passion, and not at all the Duty of Repentance; which is an entire Change of Mind, and an effectual Reformation of Life.

It is true, indeed, this is all that a Man who has led a wicked Life, can do, when he comes to die, and it would be well for his own Sake, and for the Sake of his sorrowful Friends and Relations, that he would do thus much, and not go out of the World hardened and unrepenting; (for who knows how far infinite Mercy may at last be extended?) But, surely, it must be allowed to be the greatest Instance of Folly and Madness, to venture a Matter of such infinite Moment upon so uncertain an Issue; for if the dying Agonies and Horrors, the solemn Vows and Resolutions of such Men should not prove a true godly Sorrow, a Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of, (as no Man living can say they certainly will,) they are lost and undone to all Eternity. But,

Supposing a late Repentance to be hearty and sincere, yet we have no positive and absolute Promise, that it shall be accepted of.

The plain and express Condition of the Covenant established by Christ is a holy Life; (i.e.) a constant and persevering Obedience to all the Commands of God, from the Time of our Baptism, or of our coming to the Knowledge of the Truth, until the End of our Lives; (see Page 471.) And the least that can possibly lay Claim to the Reward promised upon this Condition, is such a Repentance as produ-

selves to be, in the Event, deceitful and ill-grounded. And of those Sinners whom God restores to Health from any dangerous Sickness, how few are there in Comparison, that evidence the Sincerity of the Resolutions they then made, by a thorough Change and Reformation of their Lives!

How quickly do their good Purposes, and the Effects of their Zeal, pass away like the morning Dew, as soon as they feel the Return of vital Heat and Strength, as soon as they think the Danger is over, and they have nothing more at present to fear. (*)

As

ces the actual Obedience of at least some proportionable Part of a Man's Life.

Therefore to say, that the Original Condition of the Christian Covenant is such, that a Man may safely live wickedly all his Life, and satisfy all his Lusts and Appetites in the world, provided he does but leave off and forsake his Sins at the last, is really to take away the Necessity of a holy Life, and to undermine the very Foundation of all Virtue. Consequently,

Tho' God may possibly have Reserves of Mercy, which, in Event, He may exercise towards Men in their last Extremity; yet Originally it is certain, the Gospel Covenant gives no Assurance of Comfort, but either to a constant and persevering Holiness, or to a Repentance evidenced by actually renewed Obedience. The former is by far the most preferable; for, tho' God is represented in the Parable, as a Father receiving with Joy the returning Prodigal; yet, the Fulness of Reward (as we read) is with Him, who never willingly transgressed. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

(*) *Quæ Vita cum Sole redit.*

As Sinners, therefore, have perhaps often designed and resolved without performing, they will have too much Reason to suspect the Sincerity of their own Hearts, and to rely but little on a Change of Purpose, which present and pressing Danger extorts from them.

But, Supposing their penitential Purposes to be rightly qualified, considering the Fickleness and Mutability of our Nature, nothing but the Fruits and Effects of Repentance can create in us an Assurance that we are inwardly changed; and consequently they must die very uncomfortably, and in great Doubt and Anxiety of Mind, what their Fate and Doom will be to all Eternity, who defer their Repentance to this last State of their Lives.

As all other Habits can no other Way be removed than by substituting contrary Customs, which is the Work of Patience, Resolution, and repeated Attempts, so the same must hold good concerning evil Habits.

Tho therefore a Change of Mind, and a Purpose of Amendment may be wrought soon and suddenly; yet a Change of Behaviour (which is the only sure Proof of Amendment) requires Time and Labour; and it is hard to conceive how a late Repentance can change bad Habits, unless we suppose that the Alteration for the better, which is just beginning in this World, may be carried on and completed in the next; But,

concerning this; the Scriptures are silent, nay rather, affirmative of the Reverse, "as a Tree falls so must it lie." – but who, even at the best, would risque his Soul upon conjectural Hopes?

Should a Sinner, then, escape all the foregoing Accidents; should he go off gently without being forsaken by his Sense or Reason; yet still, (which is yet more) it may happen, and often it does, that his promised Repentance produces nothing but Horror and Despair.

In his Life-time he flattered himself with unreasonable Hopes of Mercy, and now he begins to see how unreasonable they were: now he can think of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the just Rewards of Wickedness: he sees him already clothed with Wrath and Majesty; and forms, within his own tormented Breast, the whole Process of the last Day. If he sleeps, he dreams of Judgment and Misery; and when he wakes, believes his Dreams forebode his Fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of Comfort and Hope, without Confidence to ask Pardon, and without Faith to receive it, does the wretched Sinner expire, and has the Misfortune to see his Hopes die before him.

In a Word, then, put all the favourable Circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the Sinner by the gentlest Decays of Nature to his latter End,

give

give him the fairest and longest Warning; yet still you give him no Security. If he is not sensible of his Sin and Impenitence, he will die hardened and obdurate against the Thoughts of Judgment: or, if he comes to a Sense of them, and sees his own Unworthiness, Despair and Dread will be his Portion: for, as the Devil first prevailed with him to delay his Repentance, persuading him it was Time enough then; so now he will arm his Weapons, and assure him it is now too late.

Upon the Whole: — The utmost, (as we have seen,) that a Sinner can do, upon his Death Bed, is but little; and even as to that little, there is Uncertainty upon Uncertainty, whether he will have Time, or Power, or Inclination, to do it; not to add the Sin and Wickedness of wilfully trespassing upon the Patience, Longsuffering, and Forbearance of God, his Wisdom and Authority, in giving us a Day of Grace, and commanding us to live according to his Laws; and yet refusing him any Submission or Obedience to them, till we can serve our Sins no longer; The Consequence of which must be, (if the Sinner shall be able to reflect at all) that Horror and Despair will at last naturally attend him; for, as he hath lived, not only without God in this World, but in Opposition to, and (if I may so speak) in Defiance of him, what Hopes can he have in his latter End?

Serm. CCCLIX. Con-

Considerations these sufficient to discourage any Man from the Hopes of a happy Death, who defers his Repentance till he comes to die. And I, who, for a thousand Worlds, would be found in a State of Unpreparedness, or Unfitness in a Day, that he is not aware of; since there is no Repentance in the Grave, nor Change of Condition after Destruction, but as we are found at the last coming of our Lord, in the same State we must be judged at his last and awful Appearance.

Ever therefore let us expect Death, but not wish for it; let our last Hour find us rather willing to go, than desirous to stay: let us take care that we put not off Repentance to another Day, till we see not the End of this.

Sermon

SERMON CCCLX.

On the ſame Subject.

Caſes conſidered.

Ecc'us. xviii. 22. "Defer not till Death to be juſ-
"tified."

Many, (as we have ſeen) are the Arguments and Diſ-ſuaſives againſt Delay, or deſignedly putting-off the neceſſary Work of Repentance to our laſt Days, or perhaps to our laſt Moments. And yet notwithſtanding,

How apt are Men to flatter themſelves, in a Courſe of Sin and Impiety, with the Hopes in their declining Age, or perhaps in their laſt Moments, of making up the former Breaches of their Duty, by turning to God, and lamenting their former Impieties; (i.e) when they are paſt the Pleaſures of Sin, and their Bodies are no longer able to follow the Motions of it, they will then be content to offer it up a Sacrifice, ſuch as it is, to God, in Order to reconcile themſelves to him.

But certainly, — When we are commanded in Scripture, and by the Church, to "preſent our Bodies

a

a holy and lively Sacrifice to God," something more must be delegged than a few [illegible] Sighs of a shattered Body in the Extremities of Life: for, this indeed is not to present the Body a LIVING, but a DEAD Sacrifice to God. — And,

How far such may be acceptable to him, He hath no where expressly told us; and several pious and learned Men are of Opinion, that He will not accept it; but, all Men are agreed in this, that it is the Height of Folly and Madness for any One to put his Salvation upon so very doubtful and dangerous an Issue. Not that sincere Repentance and real Reformation will ever come too late for Acceptance. "When the wicked Man turneth away from his Wickedness, that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right," we may pronounce, upon the highest Authority, that "he shall save his Soul alive." But we have no Authority to pronounce, that "they may," at Pleasure, "do good who have been accustomed to do evil;" or, that such as have long been sinning wilfully, shall presently be renewed again unto Repentance, upon their vouchsafing to call a Thought that Way. Reasoning, by Analogy, from similar Cases, leads us toward a different Conclusion.

We see almost daily Examples, wherein mere Sorrow, and even ardent Wishes, nay, real Endeavours

are

are found insufficient to repair a Man's Fortune, or to restore his Health, when once wasted and destroyed by Riot and Extravagance. And, if such Methods are thus unable to set all Right in Men's temporal Concerns, what wise Man would reduce himself to a Necessity of trying their Success in an Affair of infinitely greater Moment, or of relying on their Efficacy, not only for removing all the Consequences of a Life of Sin, but for securing the Rewards of a Life of Holiness?

The Truth is, Repentance itself is no such easy Matter as seems to be too commonly supposed. The Completion of it, at least, if not the first Motion towards it, is certainly "the Gift of God." And how can the habitual Sinner presume, that the Spirit of God should always strive with him? Why should he not rather apprehend, that the Time may soon come, when, though he should become "willing to inherit the Blessing," he hath profanely despised, his Pretensions shall be rejected? not because real Repentance would even then be unavailable, supposing him capable of it; but because he shall then "find no Place of Repentance, though he should seek it earnestly with Tears."

The Goodness and Mercy of God towards Persons not capable of becoming good, is a Goodness that does

not agree with the infinite Purity and Holiness of God. It is such a Goodness, that, if it were proposed to the World, it would encourage Men to live in Sin, and to think that a few Acts of Homage offered to God in our last Extremities, could so far please him, as to bribe and corrupt him. (*)

The forming a false Notion of the Goodness of God, as of a Tenderness that is to be overcome with Importunities, and not to be gained by becoming like him,

is

(*) Whether those who have lived under the continual Calls of Grace to Virtue and Holiness, who have rejected the Counsel of God whilst they had Health & Strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary Mercy as last, let any reasonable Man judge.

It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians in this Way, which would be at once to evacuate all the Rules and Duties of the Gospel. Christ came to destroy Sin and the Works of the Devil, but were Men promised Forgiveness upon the Account of a few Sighs and Tears at last, this would effectually establish and confirm the Kingdom of Satan.

Though God has promised Pardon to penitent Sinners, yet his Promise must be expounded so as to be consistent with his Design of sending Christ into the World; and then it can never be extended to those, who use the Gospel as a Protection to Wickedness, and sin because God has promised to be merciful. In a Word, we have the Promises of the Gospel set before us, we have the Mercies of God in Christ offered to us; if we will accept them, and do our Part, happy are we: but if we are for finding out new Ways to Salvation, if we seek to reconcile the Pleasures and Profits of Sin with the Hopes of the Gospel, we do but deceive ourselves; for God is not mocked, nor will He regard those who make such perverse Use of his Mercy.

is a great and fundamental Error in Religion. (*)

What Security, then, have Sinners, that if they do repent upon a Death-bed, God will then accept them? Is it fit that ſinful and diſobedient Creatures, obnoxious to the Wrath of God, and every Way unworthy of his Mercy, ſhould deſpiſe all his gracious Offers of Forgiveneſs, and declare they will not be reconciled to him, till they have enjoyed the vile Pleaſures of Sin, as long as they pleaſe? Is it not an Inſtance of his Goodneſs and Compaſſion, and the Purchaſe of no leſs a Price than the Blood of Chriſt, that the Benefit of Repentance is at all allowed them, after great, wilful, and preſumptuous Crimes? Shall Men then, inſtead of thankfully accepting this ineſtimable Mercy, trample upon it and deſpiſe it, by continuing obſtinately in Sin, and heap up unto "themſelves Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God?"

Would any Earthly Governour bear with thoſe who ſhould tell him, they would rebel againſt him as long as they pleaſed, and then intended to ſue to him for Pardon afterward? Excellent are the Words of the Son of Sirach to this Purpoſe; "Say not, I have ſinned, and what Harm has happened unto me? for though the Lord is long-ſuffering, he will in no wiſe let thee go.

Con-

(*) See Vol. iii. Page 153. Serm. CCCLX.

Concerning Propitiation, be not without Fear, to add Sin unto Sin; And say not, his Mercy is great, he will be pacified for the Multitude of Sins; For Mercy and Wrath come from him, and his Indignation resteth upon Sinners; Make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from Day to Day; for suddenly shall the Wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy Security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the Day of Vengeance." It is not without particular Reason so distinctly recorded in Scripture, how David, for the Act of two presumptuous Sins, was driven out from his Kingdom, and afflicted with great and almost continual Calamities the remaining Part of his Life; And yet He was a Person eminent for great and illustrious Virtues, and his Repentance for those particular Sins was early and very exemplary. Where then shall those appear, who live in the continued habitual Practice of great and crying Sins, and think to expiate all the Wickedness of a whole Life, by the careless Formalities of a late Repentance? — "If Judgment thus begins at the House of God, and the Righteous scarcely be saved; where shall the Ungodly and the Sinner appear?" — Besides,

"When a Man has robbed God, Days without Number, of the Strength, and Flower, and Beauty of them, how can he expect that God should accept the wretched Remains?

In

"Is it meet to say to God (and yet this is the secret Language of his Heart, when an old Sinner comes to repent) "Lord, I have devoted the Beauty and Strength of this dying Body to the Service of my Sins, my Lusts and Impurities; but, finding now that I have no Taste or Relish for them, and fearing thy just and almighty Vengeance, I desire thee to accept these dry Bones, this wretched Remains of my former Follies and Disorders, as the best Sacrifice I can now offer, and which yet I should never have thought of offering at all, if my former Strength had not failed me."

What can be more insolemble? And yet this, God knows, is the most of what the Repentance of a great many dying Sinners amounts to. May we not justly apply to such Penitents the Words of the Prophet Malachi, "Offer it now to thy Governor, will he be pleased with thee, or will he accept thy Person?"

Let us, therefore, consecrate to God the first and best of our Days, when we enjoy Health, Strength of Mind, and Liveliness of Spirits: Then is the Heart a noble Sacrifice, and best worthy of being presented to the great Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Contrariwise, How dare we expect that God should accept our Repentance at such a Time, when we before resolved to put it off, till we could sin no longer?

This is not spoken to discourage Repentance even

at that Time; for it is always the beſt thing we can do: (*) but, to diſcourage Men from putting off ſo neceſſary a Work till then. — Indeed,

When it comes to this, and a Sinner finds himſelf going out of the World, if he hath been ſo foolish as to put things on this laſt Hazard, Repentance then is his ſole Remedy, and the only Refuge he has left; and in this Caſe he ought earneſtly to be perſuaded to it.

But, as for ſuch, as are well, and in Health, no Encouragement can be given them to venture their Souls on ſo great an Uncertainty. — For, at beſt, it is a very dangerous Remedy; eſpecially where Men, with Deſign contrive to rob God of the beſt of their Days, and put him off with a few unprofitable Sighs and Tears at the Hour of Death.

Great things are ſaid in Scripture in Favour of Repentance and Amendment, and they are conſtantly repreſented as certain Means to appeaſe the divine Diſpleaſure. — But,

When this Repentance is delayed till no Reformation

(*) We ſay, and we ſay truly, Happy is the Man who at any Time of his Life doth ſeriouſly apply himſelf to Virtue and Goodneſs; yet it muſt be owned by all, that much more happy is He, who hath from the Beginning walked in the Paths of Virtue and Goodneſs, and hath not at any Time groſsly ſtrayed from the Rules of his Duty. — *Nunquam ſera eſt ad bonas Mores Via. Præſtat ſerò, quàm nunquàm.—Serò, ſed Serio.*

don can appear, what ſhall we ſay of it? — How far it may profit, God only knows.

It becomes us not to ſet Bounds to his Goodneſs; but this we muſt ſay, that theſe are Favours which can only proceed from his hidden Mercies, and which he hath not expreſſly promiſed in the Goſpel.

We would, indeed, willingly indulge the pleaſing Hope, that there may be undiſcovered Treaſures of Compaſſion in the ſecret Counſels of God, without which the Condition of but too many of us would be moſt deplorable.

But then, let us live as if we had no ſuch Hopes; leſt by preſuming too much, and performing too little, we ſhould at laſt find ourſelves deluded and excluded.

The laſt Thing, therefore, proper to be conſidered is, what Hopes or Encouragement God hath given us, to believe, that he will abate of thoſe Conditions which are required in the Goſpel.

Now, though the Conditions of Salvation are the ſame to Perſons ſick and dying as to Men in Health, and that both are under the ſame Covenant, and the ſame actual Obedience is required of all under equal Penalties, yet there are two Inſtances commonly mentioned in Favour of a Death-bed Repentance: the one is that of the penitent Theif on the Croſs, and the other of the Laborers who came into the Vineyard at the ele-

venth Hour, and yet received equal Wages with those that came in at the first, and had borne the Burden and the Heat of the Day." (*)

The Thief upon the Cross indeed was accepted, because it was the first Opportunity, though in the last Part of his Life, that he had of confessing his Faith in Christ: But from hence no Argument or Apology can be drawn for those, who wilfully despise our Lord and his holy Commandments, in the whole Course of their Lives. (†)

The

(*) There are, indeed, Instances in Scripture of great Sinners whose Conversion has been as remarkable as their Sins were great and many; yet there is no Instance of any that ever wilfully and designedly (after their Knowledge of the Truth) delayed their Repentance, and yet perfected it, and were accepted afterward. On the Contrary; the Scripture rather expresses an exceeding great Danger, lest *such* Persons should not be accepted at all.

(†) As many wicked Persons, and some of them very ignorant, are often induced to delay the necessary Work of Repentance till they are almost in the Agonies of Death, and consequently incapable to sin any longer, from the Case of the penitent Thief on the Cross, and are thereby deluded, to the Perdition of their Souls: In Order, therefore, to rectify so dangerous an Error, and convince the Ignorant and Unwary of the fatal Consequence of it, I shall propose the following Considerations.

First, What Reason have we to think that the Thief voluntarily put off his Conversion to that Time? none, we think, can be assigned: nay, it is not improbable but he might have been converted before, tho we have no Account of his declaring his Belief in our

Blessed

The Laborers who were called into the Vineyard

Bleſſed Lord before that Time, which might be owing to his former Obſcurity, or to his being confined in Priſon.

But, however that be, as we have no Reaſon to think his not being a Diſciple of our Bleſſed Lord's was owing to his Obſtinacy but his Ignorance; his being graciouſly accepted by our Bleſſed Saviour, cannot be Matter of any Comfort to thoſe who willingly and deliberately put off their Repentance to a future Day; for his Caſe is quite different from theirs.

He ſeems, upon the preſent Suppoſition, to have never heard of Chriſt till then, or, at leaſt, never to have been called or inſtructed by him; they, on the contrary, have been brought up from their Childhood in the Belief and Profeſſion of Him, have often had his Precepts preſſed upon them, and the Neceſſity of obeying them frequently inculcated, if they would attain eternal Life.

Secoudly, Suppoſing him to have been converted when our Saviour was upon the Croſs, his Merit therein far ſurpaſſes what any of them can pretend to. They believe in our Bleſſed Lord after they have ſeen him vanquiſhing the Powers of Darkneſs, and triumphantly aſcending into Heaven. The Thief profeſſeth his Belief & Truſt in Him, at the ſame Time that he ſees him in the State of his greateſt Humility, in the moſt low, abject, & miſerable Condition poſſible. This was an Act of Faith wonderfully extraordinary, and moſt illuſtrious and eminent. For the Thief had not, at the Time of his Converſion, ſeen any of thoſe Convulſions, and ſtrange Appearances in Nature which followed our Lord's Death, nor thoſe other Evidences which accompanied his Reſurrection and Aſcenſion. — So that though our Bleſſed Lord did extend his Mercies to this Perſon immediately upon his Converſion and Repentance, being ſo remarkable and meritorious, yet Infidels, Men of wicked and profane Lives, cannot, in theſe Days, have any Reaſon to hope for the ſame; be-

yard at the eleventh Hour, were entertained, because they cauſe *their* Faith falls far ſhort of *his*, & they voluntarily defer doing that to another Time, which they know they ought to do inſtantly.

Beſides, his was attended with as many Effects of a ſincere Converſion and Repentance as the Condition he was in, was capable of. He expreſſed his Belief in Chriſt when he was in the midſt of all the Temptations poſſible to act the contrary; when our Bleſſed Lord was upon the Croſs; when the other Thief would have had him rail at him, as *he* did, when the Chief Prieſts, the Scribes, and Elders, were mocking him; when they that paſſed by, wagging their Heads, reviled him; when even his own Diſciples were ſo confounded at his Fate, that one of them had abſolutely denied knowing him, and all the reſt forſook him and fled: yet, even then, this penitent Thief, profeſſed his Belief in him, as the Redeemer of Mankind, with a moſt ſincere Contrition acknowledged the Folly and Perverſeneſs of his Ways, and, with the greateſt Humility & Devotion, prayed to him for Mercy: "Lord, remember me, when thou comeſt into thy Kingdom."

But what Effects of a ſincere Repentance can they, who put it off to a Death-bed, hope to produce, when they now willfully neglect to amend their Lives, a Reſolution to do which is one eſſential and neceſſary Part in a true Penitent And can they reaſonably think, that they ſhall then have a thorough Hatred of their Sins, and earneſtly deſire to amend their Lives, when now they have Opportunity, nothing is ſo diſagreeable to them, as the Thought of leaving their darling Vices, and ſetting about Reformation? No, certainly; as a Man does not arrive at the higheſt Pitch of Wickedneſs all at once, neither is it to be expected, that he who has been long accuſtomed to a vicious Courſe of Life, ſhould, on a ſudden, conceive a perfect Hatred to it, and become a good Man in an Inſtant. Both of them are the Works of Time, and all the Difference between them is,

that

they had no Opportunity of coming-in in the Morning; But it would have been no Excuſe to Thoſe who were called in the Morning, to have ſaid at Night, that they were ſorry for having been idle "all the Day." Concerning ſuch Perſons the Scripture threatens, that "when once the Maſter of the Houſe is riſen up, and has ſhut to the Door, and they begin to ſtand without, and to knock at the Door, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; he ſhall anſwer, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye Workers of Iniquity." And God, in the Perſon of Wiſdom, forewarns them, "Becauſe I have called, and ye refuſed; I have ſtretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; But ye have ſet at nought all my Counſel, and would none of my Reproof; I alſo will laugh at your Calamity, and mock when your Fear cometh; When your Fear cometh as Deſolation, and your Deſtruction cometh as a Whirlwind;

that a Man will ſooner depart from Virtue, than the Wicked and Profane become righteous. Beſides, have not Men great Reaſon to fear, that it may prove too late to knock when the Door ſhall be ſhut; and too late to cry for Mercy, when it is the Time for Juſtice.

Upon the Whole, then, We think, the Sinner has no Reaſon, from this Inſtance, to defer his Repentance, or to imagine that a Death-bed Remorſe and Sorrow for his Sins (ſuppoſing God ſhould grant it him) will avail him much; and, if ſo, we know of no Ground he can have from any other Part of Scripture for an Opinion of ſo pernicious and dangerous a Conſequence.

Serm. CCCLX.

wind, when Diſtreſs and Anguiſh cometh upon you. Then ſhall they call upon Me, but I will not anſwer; they ſhall ſeek me early, but they ſhall not find me." And our Saviour repreſents their Caſe under the Parable of five fooliſh Virgins, who neglecting to trim their Lamps till the Noiſe of the bridegroom's coming, were excluded, as unprepared for the Wedding:—And ſeems to inſinuate in the Manner of his weeping over Jeruſalem, that the Time may come, when "the things that belong to Men's Peace, ſhall be hid from their Eyes;" Which if ever it be verified in ſingle Perſons, it muſt needs be upon ſuch as we are now deſcribing. And St. Paul applies to them the evil State of the Jews in the Wilderneſs, who having often provoked God, and long refuſed to obey him and enter into the promiſed Land; at laſt, when they would have entred, he ſuffered them not, "but ſware upto them in his Wrath, that they ſhould not enter into his Reſt;" And the Apoſtle compares preſumptuous Sinners to Eſau, "Leſt there be any Fornicator or profane Perſon as Eſau, who for one Morſel of Meat ſold his Birth-right; For ye know how afterwards, when he would have inherited the Bleſſing, he was rejected; for he found no Place of Repentance, though he ſought it carefully with Tears;" (i.e) Men may by a Habit of Wickedneſs, bring themſelves into ſuch Circumſtances, that it

ſhall

ſhall be, if not morally impoſſible, yet exceeding difficult to renew them again unto ſuch a Repentance, as ſhall be accepted for true and effectual.

As to that Text of Scripture, which affirms that "Joy ſhall be in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt Perſons which need no Repentance;" there are but too many who encourage themſelves in Wickedneſs from it, in Hopes that ſo good and merciful a God will bear with them; and, like an indulgent Father, be always ready to meet them in their Return to him: nay; they conclude from hence, that the longer they continue in a ſinful impenitent State, the more acceptable, if not, in ſome Degree, meritorious, will their Repentance at laſt be.

"The Joy of the holy Angels in the Preſence of God," is an Argument, indeed, that the Repentance of a Sinner, at any Time, is highly pleaſing and acceptable unto Him; but it is, by no Means, an Argument, that all Sinners, eſpecially ſuch as have lived for any long Time in a general Contempt of the Laws of Religion, ſhall have Time or Grace to repent: it rather, indeed, implies the contrary; that Repentance to ſuch Perſons is a very hazardous and difficult Work – that their Condition is dangerous, and their Recovery, at the beſt, very doubtful. For, The

The Joy here mentioned, does not arise from any fixed & settled Complacency of Mind, but is a Joy of Surprize, from an extraordinary or uncommon Event; as when we have in a Manner given any thing over for lost, the Recovery of it, by what Means soever, causes in us, for the Time, a more sensible Joy, than many other superior Advantages, which we stand possessed of, the Mind of Man being so limited, that any one moving Pleasure and Satisfaction at a Time, in a great Measure, takes up the Capacity of it.

It is by Way of Accommodation to this imperfect State of human Nature, that we are to understand "the Joy of the holy Angels in the Presence of God upon a Sinner's Repentance;" [viz] such a Joy as arises from an Event, of which, morally speaking, there was no great Probability or Expectation. (*) But

(*) In Reference to the Parable here alluded to, what reasonable, what tolerable Grounds can a Sinner have to expect, that if, (like the lost Sheep, as here represented) he forsake the Paths of Virtue and Innocence to wander in the dark and intricate Ways of Sin, or (to express it in the beautiful and significant Language of the Book of Wisdom) if "he err from the Way of Truth, to weary himself in the Way of Wickedness and Destruction, and to go thro the Desarts, where no Way lies," Where is the Hope of such a Sinner, that he shall be able to recover himself, and return? — The further he goes and is entangled, will it not be still more difficult for him to disengage himself from his Errors, and, at the same Time, render those Means and Endeavours, which are made use of to restore him, still more

But some will say, is there then no Hopes, no Remedy? what must a wicked Man do when he happens to be thus surprised by Death? We are far from taking upon us to limit the Mercies of God; they are over all his Works, and are as infinite as himself. Such Persons therefore, as have spent their Days in Luxury, Prophaneness, and Contempt of all Religion, but at last humbly beg Pardon, heartily promise, and resolve Amendment, we must leave to his Goodness, Pity, and gracious Compassion, who, though he obliges us to Rules, yet is not himself bound by them, and who may do more for us than he hath any where promised. And therefore Persons in such Circumstances ought to be encouraged and quickened to do all that they can, (*) and to submit themselves to God's good Pleasure.

All that can be said of such Men, is, the greater and more remarkable their Repentance is, the more Hopes there will be of their Forgiveness. But certain it is, that God hath no where expressly declared that he will accept of all our Sorrows, Submissions, Promises, and Resolutions, made on a Sick-bed; all these do not amount more difficult and ineffectual. No Wonder, then, if, by any Means, he should be saved at the last, Joy in Heaven and on Earth should be occasioned by it.

(*) See Page 506.

mount to what is the plain Condition of the Covenant of Grace. Indeed, what God may do, none can say; but he hath plainly enough told us what we are to do, and it is the greatest Madness in the World to run so great a Hazard, as that we cannot be saved without a Dispensation from the ordinary Rule. — "Do I say, (saith St. Augustine) such an one shall be damned? I dare not. Do I say, he shall be saved? I cannot. What say I then? Will you free yourself from all Uncertainty in this Matter? Repent now, whilst you are in Health, forsake your Sins whilst you are able to commit them, and then you are sure of Pardon."

We dare not give Men certain Assurance of everlasting Life on any other Terms than of a constant habitual Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel. The only certain Way to die well, is, to live well.

Nor shall we go about to determine how much of our Life must be spent in the Practice of Righteousness and Goodness, before we can be said to have lived well, since this varies according to the Circumstances of Men, which are infinite; however this we think, may safely be said, that so much Time of our Life ought to be spent in the Practice of Goodness, as will be necessary to make us holy, humble, pure, meek, patient, just, temperate, Lovers of God and Men; for the Gospel does not promise eternal Life and Glory to any but

But Persons thus qualified, and it is certain, that a few pious Wishes, Prayers, and Purposes, made at our Death, will not suffice to denominate us such. God doth not observe just how Men die, but he will "judge every Man according to his Works, and the Deeds he hath done in the Flesh; and those Dispositions we have nourished, loved, and delighted in all our Life, will follow and attend us to the other World. (*)

Let us not, then, judge nor censure Others whose Lives we may have been acquainted with, whose Condition may seem sad and deplorable; (such we are to pity, pray for, and exercise our Charity upon, and leave to God's Mercy;) but let us resolve not to defer the Care of our own Souls to a sick or Death-bed, but To-day, even whilst it is called To-day, to depart from Iniquity. Let us all endeavour so to live Now, as we shall wish we had done when we come to lie upon our Death-bed; set us pursue those things Now, which we shall THEN like to think of, and reflect upon with Pleasure; and immediately forsake all such things, the Remembrance of which, at that Time, will be bitter to us. Let us whilst we are well and in Health, entertain the same Thoughts and Apprehensions of things, that we shall have when we are sick and dying. Let us now as much despise this World, and think as ill of Sin, and as seriously of God and Eternity, as we shall then do.

(*) See Vol. vi. Page 323. Serm. 360. What

What is important at the Close of Life, is not only the Temper in which we leave the World, but the Situation in which we ſtand with Reſpect to that great Judge, before whom we are about to appear. This View of our Situation is apt to eſcape us, during the ordinary Courſe of Life. Occupied with the Affairs and Concerns of this World, flattered with thoſe illuſive Colours of Innocence and Virtue, in which Self-love forms our Character, Apprehenſions of Guilt create but little Uneaſineſs to the Multitude of Men who think not of dying, till they can live no longer. But on the Approach of Death, their Ideas change, as the Inquiſition of the Supreme Judge draws nigh, remembered Tranſgreſſions crowd upon the Mind, Guilt becomes ſtrongly realized to the Imagination, and Alarms, before unknown, to ariſe. Hence that Anxiety, in the Proſpect of a future inviſible World, which is ſo often ſeen to attend the Bed of Death. Hence thoſe various Methods, which Superſtition has deviſed for quieting this Anxiety; the trembling Mind eagerly graſping at every feeble Means for Support; and flying for Protection to the moſt unavailing Aid. The ſtouteſt Spirits have been then known to bend; the proudeſt Hearts, to be humbled. They, who are now thoughtleſs about their Spiritual Concern, may, perhaps, be in this State before they die.

It

It highly concerns every one therefore to ſtudy in their full Day, the important things which belong to their Peace, "before the Sun and the Moon, and the Stars be darkened in them," and all the Joys of Life be fled and gone; and, before the dark Hours approach, ſo to live as may afford Reflections that will ſoften the Agony of the laſt Moments when they come, and let in upon the departing Soul a Ray of Divine Mercy, to illuminate its Paſſage into an awful Eternity.

How ſpeedily will the Conſummation of all things commence; — for yet a very little while, and the commiſſioned Arch-angle will deſcend, and lift up his Hand to Heaven, and ſwear by the Almighty, that "Time ſhall be no longer." Then Abuſed Opportunities will never return, nor will new and freſh Ones ever more be offered. Should negligent Mortals then wiſh ever ſo paſſionately for a few Hours, or Moments only to be thrown back from the opening Eternity, Thouſands of Worlds will not be able to procure the Grant.

What the End of Time is to the World, that, and of equal Weight and Concern, is Death to every Man in particular; as it cloſes his Scene here below, and ſummons him to Eternity. How awful! and how much to be prepared for!

It becomes us, therefore, if ever we would obtain a comfortable and well-grounded Aſſurance, that we ſhall

be found true and ſincere Penitents at the Hour of Death, to ſerve God in Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs all the Days of our Life. (*)

I ſhall Conclude all with thoſe excellent Sayings of the Son of Sirach. "Bind not one Sin upon another, for in One thou ſhalt not be Unpuniſhed.

"Say not, God will look upon the Multitude of my Oblations, and when I offer to the Moſt-High God, he will accept it." "Be not without Fear to add Sin unto Sin: and ſay not, God's Mercy is great, and he will be pacified for the Multitude of thy Sins; for Mercy and Wrath are with him, and his Indignation reſteth upon Sinners." "He is mighty to forgive, and to pour out Diſpleaſure; and, as his Mercy is great, ſo are his Corrections alſo."

"Make no tarrying, therefore, to turn to the Lord, and put not off from Day to Day, leſt the Wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy ſeeming Security thou be ſuddenly deſtroyed." – "Before Judgment examine thyſelf, and in the Day of Viſitation thou ſhalt find Mercy." – "Humble thyſelf before thou be ſick, and in Time of Sins ſhew Repentance: Let nothing hinder

(*) All Perſons (with Balaam) deſire to die well, but it is the Ambition of few to live ſo: whereas, it ſhould be conſidered, that the One is only the Conſequence of the other; a happy Death being the never failing Portion of a well-ſpent Life.

der thee to pay thy Vows in due Time, and defer not till Death to be juſtified."—"Work your Work betimes, and in His Time He will give you your Reward." (*)

(*) See the Diſcourſe on Repentance, in the 7th Vol. of this Work.

The End of the EIGHTEENTH Volume.

(*) See the Discourse on Temptation, in the 7th Vol. of my Works.

The End of the Thirteenth Volume.